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THE
INFIRMITIES OF GENIUS
ILLUSTRATED

BY REFERRING THE ANOMALIES IN

THE LITERARY CHARACTER
TO THE
HABITS AND CONSTITUTIONAL PECULIARITIES
OF
MEN OF GENIUS.

BY

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*Qui ratione corporis non habent, sed cogunt mortalem immortali, terrestrem
ætheræ equalem prestare industriam.*

PLUTARCH, DE. SANIT. TUEND.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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THE
INFIRMITIES OF GENIUS.

CHAPTER I.

COWPER.

A FEW centuries ago, the clergy were entrusted with the care of the health of the community, either because the healing art was held in such respect, that it was derogatory to its dignity to suffer laymen to perform the high duties of so noble a profession, or because the lucrative nature of a medical monopoly was as well understood by the church in the dark ages, as

it is by the college in these enlightened times. The faculty, however, flourished in the cloister, and the learned monk and the skilful leech were one and the same person. A great deal of good, and no doubt a certain quantity of evil resulted from the combination of the two vocations: of the good, it is sufficient to remember that the clergy acquired a two-fold claim to the gratitude, and also to the generosity, of the public; of the evil, we need only reflect on the extent of the influence conjoined—of the priest and the physician—to tremble at the power as well as at the result of their coalition. We know not, however, whether this evil may not have been counterbalanced, in some degree, by the advantage of the superior opportunities afforded the medical divine, of distinguishing the nature of moral maladies combined with physical, or confounded with them; and of dis-

covering the source of those anomalies in both, which puzzle the separate consideration of the doctor, and the divine. Plato, indeed, says that "all the diseases of the body proceed from the soul;" if such were the case, physic should prefer the service of theology to the ministry of nature. But the quaintest of authors, and at the same time most orthodox of churchmen, dissents from the opinion of the philosopher. "Surely," he says, "if the body brought an action against the soul, the soul would certainly be cast and convicted, that, by her supine negligence, had caused such inconvenience, having authority over the body." Be this as it may, Time, the oldest radical, who revolutionizes all things, has remodelled the constitution of physic; the divine has ceased to be a doctor; and Taste, no less innovatory than Time, has divested the former of his cowl,

and the latter of his wig; but science, it is to be hoped, has gained by the division of its labour, as well as by the change of its costume.

We had, however, almost forgotten the point to which we meant our observations to apply.

Cowper's malady being connected with certain delusions on the subject of religion, the attention of serious people has been very much called to his history, and the result has been, that most of the biographical details and memoirs of him, have been written by clergymen. Hayley's "Life" is an exception, and a recent one by Taylor, which, in a religious point of view, is unexceptionable. But its fault, like that of all the others of its class, is, that while the character of Cowper is tried by all the tests that morality can apply to it, the specific malady which occasioned or influenced his hallucinations is left unnoticed; and the mystery of his

religious despondency is still involved in the same obscurity in which they found it. They have looked upon his gloom as a supernatural visitation, and not a human infirmity, which was explicable on any known principle of medical science. One of them has even hinted at the impiety of referring his religious gloom to any physical peculiarity. The consequence is, that Cowper's fate has not even the advantage of furnishing a salutary example of melancholy, exasperated into mania, partly by the concurrence of unpropitious circumstances, but still more by the indulgence of its victim in the errors of those "anatomists in piety who destroy all the freshness of religion by immuring themselves in the infected atmosphere of their own enthusiasm."

The object of the following observation is to point out the peculiar character of his malady, and to show how far his mental aberrations

were caused or encouraged by religious enthusiasm. It will be necessary to take a brief view of his unhappy career, and to give a short transcript of those passages in his history which are wound up with the consideration of his infirmities. But previously it behoves us to be in a condition to be able to pronounce an opinion on the nature of his disorder; and for this purpose we need only refer to the summary character of the phenomena of mania. Our inquiry extends not beyond the general knowledge of the subject that is to be found in the common definitions of the disorder. In a medical point of view we have little to do with it; our business is with the character of Cowper, and not with the history of a disease.

Insanity, according to Locke, is a preternatural fervor of the imagination, not altogether destructive of the reasoning powers, but pro-

ducing wrongly combined ideas, and making right deductions from wrong data: while idiotcy can neither distinguish, compare, or abstract, general ideas. And “herein lies the difference between idiots and madmen—that madmen put wrong ideas together, and so make wrong propositions; while idiots make very few or no propositions, and reason scarce at all.”

“Mental aberration,” says Dr. Conolly, “is the impairment of one or more of the faculties of the mind, accompanied with, or inducing, a defect in the comparative faculty.”

Dr. Battie’s notion is more to the purpose. “Insanity,” he says, “consists in the rising up in the mind of images not distinguishable by the patient from impressions on the senses.”—Or in the few and expressive words of Hibbert, of “Ideas rendered as vivid as actual impressions.”

Cullen's idea of mania is, that its leading character is a false judgment of the relations of things, producing disproportionate emotions.

Dr. Pritchard's opinion is applicable to a wider range of mental derangements. The confounding the results of memory and imagination, and mistaking the reveries of the latter for the reflections of the former ; these he considers the distinguishing feature of madness.

Dr. Hawkesworth calls lunacy a condition of the mind in which ideas are conceived, that material objects do not excite ; and those which are excited, do not produce corresponding impressions on the senses.

In ancient times, insanity was looked upon as a sort of transmigration of the feelings and phantasies of evil spirits into the bodies of human beings ; as in the case of those demoniacs in the Scripture, who wandered about naked,

and roamed amongst sepulchres, making hideous noises.

The Greeks held the same opinion of its origin. Xenophon uses the word demon for frenzy; and Aristophanes calls madness kako-daimonian.

But the two definitions of this malady which may be found to apply to the case of Cowper, are those of Locke and Mead. The former, after noticing the characteristics of general insanity, says, "A man who is very sober, and of a right way of thinking in all other things, may in one particular be as frantic as any man in Bedlam, if either by any sudden or very strong impression, or long fixing the fancy upon one sort of thoughts, incoherent ideas become cemented together so powerfully as to remain united." Dr. Mead regards madness as a particular malady of the imagination, which arises

from intense and incessant application of the mind to any one object.

Such are the authorities we have thought it necessary to adduce; because a general notion of the character of mania is requisite to enable us to come to a just conclusion on the subject before us, and because it is the collective information of all we have quoted, rather than the particular opinions of any one of them, that is likely to lead us to a correct knowledge of the nature of Cowper's affliction.

But there is one thing to be considered in every inquiry into the insanity of an individual, which limits that inquiry to a very short and simple investigation of two obvious matters;—namely, what degree of eccentricity constitutes madness, and what amount of madness incapacitates the sufferer for the performance of the duties of his station, or for the management of his affairs?

CHAPTER II.

COWPER CONTINUED.

WE now proceed to the sad history of Cowper's mental affliction, with those sentiments of pain and even reluctance which all must feel who approach this subject, but disclaiming those feelings of false delicacy and morbid sensibility, which are commonly paraded before similar inquiries.

Cowper was the son of a clergyman, of a family of some distinction; his early education appears to have been strictly religious, but it

does not appear that his peculiar gentleness of disposition was duly observed and considerately treated by his father. In his sixth year he was deprived of an affectionate mother, and left to the guidance of persons ill qualified for the difficult task of bringing up a youth of great delicacy of constitution, and extraordinary sensibility. Nevertheless, at the tender age of six years, this timid boy was taken from home, and placed at a public school, where he became the victim, real or imaginary, of juvenile persecution. He speaks in his letters of the tyranny of one boy in particular, as having been the terror of his existence; so much so, that he never had the courage to look him in the face all the time he was at school, such an impression did the savage treatment of this boy make upon him.

“The whole of his early life,” says Stebbing,

“ appears to have been misdirected, by a most culpably erroneous judgment in those who had the superintendence of his education. Cowper, from his earliest youth, was a prey to ill-health, and gave signs, it is said, in infancy, of that nervous sensibility which, as his years increased, gradually assumed the character of morbid melancholy.”

After remaining two years at this school he was removed from it in consequence of an inflammation in his eyes, which he remained subject to the whole of his life at intervals. This, combined with other circumstances in his medical history—the fairness of his complexion, and lightness of his hair—render it probable that there was either a scorbutic or scrofulous taint in his constitution, which his peculiar delicacy of habit might not have allowed to develop itself externally, but which, neglected or

overlooked, might have made inroads on internal textures, even on those of the brain itself. Hayley corroborates this opinion when speaking of the suddenness of the attacks of his malady. “It tends,” he says, “to confirm an opinion that his mental disorder arose from a scorbutic habit, which, when his perspiration was obstructed, occasioned an unsearchable obstruction in the finer parts of his frame.”

Cowper was now sent to Westminster, where he remained till his sixteenth year; all that time his timid and inoffensive spirit totally unfitting him for the hardships of a public school. On leaving Westminster he was articled to a solicitor. It would have been impossible to have chosen for him a more unsuitable profession than that of the law. At the expiration of his term he made his entry in the Temple to qualify himself for the lucrative place of clerk to

the House of Lords—which post the interest of his friends had procured for him. During his early residence in the Temple he associated with Churchill, Colman, and other persons of literary habits, and appears to have been gay and sociable in his intercourse with them. But this mode of life, his friend, Mr. Newton, told both him and the public at a later period, in a preface to the first edition of his poems, written at the request of Cowper, “was living without God in the world,” albeit his conduct at this time appears to have been neither profligate nor depraved. It was in the Temple, however, he was seized with the first attack of his disorder; “with such a dejection of spirits,” he himself says, “as none but those who have felt the same can have the least conception of. Day and night I was upon the rack, lying down in horror, and rising up in despair. I presently

lost all relish for those studies to which I had before been closely attached. The classics had no longer any charm for me; I had need of something more salutary than amusement, but I had no one to direct me where to find it." A change of scene was now recommended to him; he accordingly proceeded to Southampton, where he spent several months, and here it was that the first shadow of insanity obscured his mind, and that the fervor of his enthusiasm on a single subject assumed the settled character of monomania. This is not the place to inquire into the nature of the malady; it is enough to know that monomania is a partial abberation of intellect, a delusion on a particular point, which has been dwelt on with such intensity that the mind magnifies its importance till its ultimate aspect becomes distorted. The malady may continue for life

without abatement, or it may disappear and return at various intervals. As "the variable atmosphere of the mind" may be affected by alterations in the general health of the individual, and the whole course of the disease is compatible with the exercise of a sound judgment in every other matter but that particular one, which has been over-rated in importance, magnified in form, and distorted in its appearance.

This brings us to two important questions. Did Cowper labour under monomania, or did he not? And was religious enthusiasm the point on which his reason was disordered? All other questions that have been mooted, concerning the mystery of his melancholy, are comprized in these two. And it is only to their solution that we can look for a satisfactory explanation of his extraordinary gloom.

With regard to the first question, it may be borne in mind that all his biographers admit their inability to account for his dejection, and that all of them reject the supposition that religious enthusiasm had any thing to do with its production. How far their opinion of its inexplicability is a just and necessary conclusion remains to be shown; at this stage of the subject any judgment would be premature. From facts alone can any opinion be formed, and those which are of most importance in the life of this afflicted man, the reader will now find laid before him.

He had spent some time at Southampton, apparently little improved by the change, when in one of his paroxysms of melancholy, on a particular occasion, he imagined his indifference to the duties of religion was signally, yet mercifully, rebuked by the Almighty, in an almost miraculous manner.

“ We were about a mile from the town, (as he himself describes it,) the morning was clear and calm, the sun shone brightly on the sea, and the country on the borders of it was the most beautiful I had ever seen. We sat down upon an eminence, at that arm of the sea which runs between Southampton and the New Forest. Here it was as if another sun had been created that instant in the heavens, on purpose to dispel sorrow and vexation of spirit. I felt the weight of my misery taken off, my heart became light and joyful in a moment ; I could have wept with transport, had I been alone ; I must needs believe the Almighty fiat, and nothing less could have filled me with such inexpressible delight, not by a gradual dawning of peace, but as it were with a flash of his life-giving countenance.”

This strong impression, which obviously derives its colouring from the enthusiasm of a

poetical imagination, excited by the beauty of splendid scenery and sudden sunshine, was unquestionably such a one as many individuals of devotional feelings might have experienced under similar circumstances; but the powerful hold it took on Cowper's imagination was such, as to confound the revelation of mercy with the terrors of inexorable justice; to make a transitory emotion of religious joy the precursor of a futurity of remorse and misery. In the reaction of enthusiasm, a feeling of unspeakable wretchedness succeeded the delightful emotion he had just described.

“Satan,” he says, “and his own wicked heart, quickly persuaded him that he was indebted for his deliverance to nothing but a change of scene, and the amusing varieties of the place; and by this means had turned the blessing into a poison.”

CHAPTER III.

COWPER CONTINUED.

FROM this time his mind became distracted with religious doubts, and ultimately with remorse. He believed that he had committed "the unpardonable sin," and incurred the dreadful penalty of eternal reprobation, for neglecting to improve to his advantage the communion of his sinful spirit with the Almighty at Southampton. In every future paroxysm of his disorder throughout his whole existence, the terrific notion, that, by his conduct on this occasion, he had

forfeited every claim to the promised blessings of the gospel, became the constant, undeviating theme of his madness; but strange it is that his religious friends and biographers should consider it necessary to give these first symptoms of fervid enthusiasm the pure and unimpassioned character of religion, and to ascribe the emotions of the enthusiast to the manifestations of the Spirit of truth and wisdom. The fact is, that Cowper's mind was early imbued with devotional feelings; at the particular period we are speaking of, and for some years previously to it, they might have been latent in his bosom, and the forms of religion have been unattended to at that season, when its duties too often are neglected. But Cowper was the least likely man in the world, so far as we can judge from the goodness of his nature, to have wanted the grace of ultimately recurring to those habits of

morality and religion, which had been instilled into his early mind. Those who encouraged his first delusion, were greatly answerable for its melancholy consequences; but it was Cowper's misfortune to have ever been under the guidance of injudicious people, of friends exclusively serious; of people, on the whole, albeit the best and most amiable of mankind, the worst fitted to enliven the dejection, or to remove the delusion, of the melancholy poet.

In speaking of the period we are alluding to, the Rev. Mr. Stebbing says, "There is nothing in the correspondence of Cowper that should induce us to believe that either enthusiasm or melancholy had been the consequence of his deep and fervent piety." "Every thing," he continues, "that we know of the life of this amiable man, tends to convince us that no abstract opinions of any kind could reasonably be

assigned as the cause of his gloom, either at the period of which we are speaking or at any other. His melancholy, indeed, might strongly influence his religious belief, might embitter the waters of life, even as they were poured out fresh into his cup. It might make him think of God, as of man, with terror, and imagine the dark shadow of his earthly fate was thrown far as he could see over the abyss of futurity, but it could do no more; religion never clogs the veins, nor distempers the intellect; and when its revelations are made a subject of unnatural fear, it is when the sun and stars are as fraught with signs, as the Scriptures with declarations, of destruction."

Now this, if it means any thing, means that a state of previous excitement was necessary to the developement of that disorder, which, if it did not combine the characters of enthusiasm

and madness, certainly confounded the narrow limits which separate them. But divested of sophistry, the opinion that is meant to be established by the reverend author, and all his followers, is that Cowper's malady was neither caused nor aggravated by religious enthusiasm. But facts speak for themselves, and we appeal to them from partial views, if not from prejudiced opinions. The account of his own feelings prove them to have been those of an enthusiast. "So long," he says, "as I am pleased with an employment, I am capable of unwearied application, because my feelings are all of the intense kind; I never received a little pleasure from any thing in my life—if I am delighted it is in the extreme. The consequence of this temperament is that my attachment to my occupation seldom outlives the novelty of it. That nerve of my imagination that feels the touch of any

particular amusement, twangs under the energy of the pressure with so much vehemence, that it soon becomes sensible of weariness and fatigue."

Cowper, after the death of his father, having but little fortune to inherit, found it necessary to augment his income by procuring a public appointment; accordingly the office of reading clerk in the House of Lords, a place of considerable emolument, was procured for him. No sooner, however, was he fairly installed in it, than he became overpowered with terror at the necessity of making a public appearance at the bar of the House. The cause of his terror appears to have been totally inadequate to the effect produced upon him; he describes the agony of his apprehension in such extravagant terms as to render his conduct inexplicable on any other supposition but that of insanity. He

threw up his appointment, and accepted the inferior one of clerk of the journals; but he had scarcely entered on the duties of his office when it occurred to him he might be subjected to a public examination, respecting his qualifications for the office, and all his former horrors and groundless apprehensions returned. The continual misery at length, he says, "brought on a nervous fever; quiet forsook me by day, and peace by night; even a finger raised against me seemed more than I could bear."

"To his disordered perception," says one of his biographers, "there appeared no possibility to escape from the horrors of his situation but by an escape from life itself. Death, which he had always shuddered at before, he began ardently to wish for now: he could see nothing before him but difficulties perfectly insurmountable, and he now meditated on the fatal expe-

dient urged upon his shattered intellect." A circumstance occurred at this time which evidently shows that he was labouring under insanity. His attention was called one day to a satirical letter in the newspaper, which he immediately imagined himself to be the subject of, although it had no reference whatever to him; he doubted not, however, but that the writer had darkly alluded to his weariness of life, his intention to end it, and had, in fact, only written the article in question, to hasten the execution of the deed he meditated. Taylor says, "that before the dreadful day approached he so greatly apprehended, he had made several attempts at the escape above alluded to; most mercifully for himself and for others, they were only attempts."

His disorder now presented so decided a character, that his friends were obliged to ac-

quiesce in the propriety of his immediately relinquishing his situation. He was, at this period, visited by his brother, who employed every means to sooth and comfort him, but he had no success; he found him overwhelmed with despair, and tenaciously maintaining, in spite of all remonstrances to the contrary, that he had been guilty of the unpardonable sin, in not properly improving the mercy of God towards him at Southampton. If this is not mania, religious monomania, we know not what is. It does not appear that any medical advice was had recourse to, but a learned divine was sent to him, who was to reason "his veins to health," and "with an argument new set a pulse."

Dr. Madan, we are told, had a long conference with him, in which he urged on him the necessity of a lively faith; but Cowper could only reply in these brief and melancholy words,

—“Most earnestly do I wish it would please God to bestow it on me.” This and subsequent interviews with the doctor, in which various religious subjects were discussed, or rather expatiated upon, appears to have been attended with still more melancholy consequences to the invalid. In the words of Taylor, “about this time he seemed to feel a stronger alienation from God than ever. He was now again the subject of the deepest mental anguish; the sorrows of death seemed to encompass him, and the pains of hell to get hold of him; his ears rang with the sound of the torments that seemed to await him; his terrified imagination presented to him many horrible visions, and led him to conceive that he heard many dreadful sounds; his heart seemed at every pulse to beat its last, his conscience scared him, the avenger of blood seemed to pursue him, and he saw no city of refuge

into which he could flee: every morning he expected the earth would open and swallow him up."

It is with no feeling of irreverence or distrust in the efficacy of religious means in moral infirmities, that we question the utility of the discussions that were forced on the attention of the dejected Cowper, at the very moment he was standing on the brink of madness, and that we doubt if the cares of the physician of the body might not have been better adapted to the sick man's state.

After vainly endeavouring to establish a lasting tranquillity in his mind, by friendly and religious conversation, it was found necessary to remove him to St. Albans; and this removal implies that he was placed in a private lunatic asylum, under the care of the celebrated Dr. Cottin. This was in 1763, and two years

afterwards we find him so much improved in health and spirits, as to be able to remove to the town of Huntingdon, where he became acquainted with the family of a clergyman, his intimacy with whom led to one of the most singular friendships on record, the most lasting, and of the purest nature. "The attachment of Cowper to Mrs. Unwin," says Hayley, "the Mary of the poet, was an attachment perhaps unparalleled; their domestic union, though not sanctioned by the common forms of life, was supported with perfect innocence." Of such a friendship it may be indeed said, "*L'amour n'est rien de si tendre, ni l'amitié de si doux.*"

CHAPTER IV.

COWPER CONTINUED.

IN a letter about this time he describes himself as perfectly recovered, and that his affliction has taught him a road to happiness which, without it, he should never have known. "How naturally," he says, "does affliction make us Christians! But it gives me some concern, though at the same time it increases my gratitude, to reflect, that a convert made in Bedlam is more likely to be a stumbling-block to others, than to advance their faith."

On the evening of his arrival at Huntingdon he walked into the country, and finding his feelings powerfully affected by a sudden impulse of devotion, he knelt under a bank and prayed for a considerable time. The result was, a second impression of a miraculous manifestation of mercy, like the former at Southampton. A load of wretchedness was immediately removed from his mind, and on arising he looked upon himself as standing redeemed and regenerated in the presence of his Maker. Dr. Johnson, in speaking of the insanity of poor Smart, said to Boswell, "Madness often discovers itself by unnecessary deviations from the usual modes of the world; my poor friend Smart showed his by falling on his knees in the street and saying his prayers." The mystery of Smart's aberration is traced by Johnson to its proper source, and called by its plain name.

Cowper was now received into the house of the Rev. Mr. Unwin, an amiable and pious family, but living in complete seclusion from the world, and mixing entirely with persons of a serious cast; a state of society, it must be allowed, ill-calculated to improve the dejected spirits of one in Cowper's condition, or to lead attention exclusively devoted to a single subject, to a more general acquaintance with the pleasing pursuits of literary people. But unfortunately his new friends completely debarred him from all intercourse with men of letters, and from all concerns except those too strictly of a spiritual nature. Surely the solitude of such society must have greatly tended to increase his melancholy, by constantly entertaining one particular train of ideas; "the reading," as Locke says, "of but one kind of books, the falling into the hearing of but one

set of opinions, and constantly conversing on but one sort of subjects." This surely was a state of things which must have eventually tended to have concentrated the clouds of insanity that had hitherto been hovering over his mental horizon.

He had hardly been two years with these good people, for such they really were, when Mr. Unwin was unfortunately killed by a fall from his horse, and Cowper was deprived of an estimable friend. The widow retired to a small cottage at Olney, and Cowper became a permanent inmate of her house. About this time he formed an intimacy with Mr. Newton, the curate of the village, which had no little influence on his future life. With great worth and goodness of disposition, there was still a spirit of austere piety in this gentleman, and even of devotional enthusiasm, which

failed not to gain a powerful ascendancy over Cowper's debilitated mind. We accordingly find him deferring to the opinion of this gentleman in all matters, even those of a literary kind; and on his becoming an author, of committing to him the singular task of writing the preface to his poems. In that preface, the public are informed, that the poet had "been long living without God in the world, till in a memorable hour the wisdom which is from above visited his heart."

The inference that is drawn from this change in his moral condition is, that an amendment in his physical one had been signal and complete, and that health and happiness had succeeded infirmity and misery; but nothing could be more erroneous than this reasoning. His subsequent wretchedness was greater than it ever had been, "owing to some cause," says Taylor,

“ for which we are unable to account.” Cowper’s correspondence with his friends became much less frequent after his settlement at Olney than it had been formerly. Probably it might be attributed to his intimacy with Mr. Newton, for we are told they were seldom seven waking hours apart from each other.

Shortly after the death of his brother, in 1769, notwithstanding he appears to have borne the loss with considerable fortitude, he became again depressed, and Mr. Newton thought that the composition of a book of hymns was the best means he could adopt to divert his dejected thoughts. “ Mr. Newton,” says Taylor, “ had felt the want of a volume of evangelical hymns, on experimental subjects, suited for public and private worship ; he mentioned the subject to Cowper, and pressed him to undertake it. Cowper did so ; but he had only com-

posed sixty-eight of these hymns, when he was seized by an alarming indisposition—a renewed attack of his former malady.” The pleasure which we derive from the perusal of these beautiful compositions (far the most exquisite poetry that Cowper ever penned is to be found in some of these hymns) must be chequered with regret that so unseasonable a time should have been chosen for their composition, that he should have been occupied with so serious an employment while he was yet suffering from the first shock of his brother’s death. One would have thought that literary employment of a lighter kind would have been just then better adapted for him; but Mr. Newton, neither in this, nor indeed any other matter connected with his friend’s health, appears to have acted a judicious part.

His second paroxysm of monomania oc-

curred in 1773, and its symptoms very nearly resembled those under which he laboured at the time of his removal from London. After enduring unmitigated misery for the space of five years, his sufferings became gradually alleviated, and his reason was at length restored. During all his illness Mrs. Unwin watched over him with the kindness of a mother, and for fourteen months his friend, Mr. Newton, kept him at the vicarage, and bestowed on him indefatigable attention. In this case, as in his former illness, his biographers endeavour to prove his mania was not of a religious character. "Various causes have been assigned," says his biographer, "by different writers, for the melancholy aberration of mind to which Cowper was now, and at other seasons of his life, subject; but none are so irreconcilable to every thing like just, pure, and legitimate reasoning, as the attempt to

ascribe it to religion." "His views," he continues, "so far from being visionary or enthusiastic, on the contrary were perfectly scriptural and evangelical." To this there is a plain and simple answer : if his views were not visionary or enthusiastic, their tendency unquestionably would help to support rather than depress his mind ; but how comes it, if he had taken no visionary view of religion, that his opinion on a particular religious point was perverted, and that he believed himself doomed to eternal reprobation for an imaginary insult to religion ? This, in common parlance, is religious madness ; the term is undoubtedly a bad one, for rational views of religion can never produce insane ideas ; but erroneous notions of its tenets, and exaggerated ideas of its penalties, may produce insanity, and does so every day, as the reports of our lunatic asylums but too evidently prove.

A living poet, whose advocacy of any opinion he espouses is entitled to respect, even when the energy with which it is undertaken carries him beyond the bounds of sober judgment, has likewise spurned at the idea of Cowper's malady being occasioned by religious enthusiasm, because the error on which he stumbled was in direct contradiction to his creed. The argument is plausible, but the inference is erroneous; for even granting that his error was in direct opposition to his creed, that is yet no proof of the assertion, that religious enthusiasm did not exist.

There is a very common species of monomania which mercantile men are especially subject to—an inordinate apprehension of abject poverty without a cause. The victim of this kind of delusion may be a man of strong mind in all other matters, excepting those that concern his circumstances; he may be possessed of

considerable wealth, and it may be invested in securities which nothing short of a national bankruptcy can endanger; yet may that man pine away in secret melancholy, under the impression that his property is in daily jeopardy, and every commercial view of his may terminate in the vista of the poor-house; yet the error on which he stumbles is in direct contradiction to his commercial creed, and to his former opinions.

His medical attendant might see plainly enough that excessive anxiety about a multiplicity of matters connected with his business, had harassed his mind to the extent of perverting his judgment on a single point of paramount importance. To one of the milder forms of adyspeptic malady, Abernethy has given the term of the "city disease." *Ceteris paribus*, the term of religious mania, objectionable though it is,

may be applied to Cowper's malady. But to return to the observation of the living poet we have alluded to. We find his following remarks no less inconclusive than the first, and his reasoning more characteristic of the nature of impassioned poetry, than of philosophical inquiry. "In spite," he continues, "of the self-evident impossibility of his faith affecting a sound mind with such hallucinations, though a mind previously diseased might as readily fall into that as any other; in spite of chronology, his first aberration having taken place before he had tasted the good word of God; in spite of geography, that calamity having befallen him in London, where he had no acquaintance with persons holding the reprobated doctrine of election and sovereign grace; and in spite of facts utterly undeniable, that the only effectual ameliorations which he experienced under his first

or subsequent attacks of depression, arose from the blessed truths of the gospel.

“In spite of all these unanswerable confutations, of the ignorant and malignant falsehoods, the enemies of Christian truth persevere in repeating that too much religion made poor Cowper mad. If they be sincere, they are themselves under the strongest delusion, and it will be well if it prove not on their part a wilful one. It will be well if they have not reached that last perversity of human reason, that of falsehood of their own invention.”

These are “words, mere words,”—strong words indeed, but not convincing ones. The invective is pointed, though not poetical, and some of the epithets are forcible, but not “familiar to ears polite.” Ignorant and malignant falsehood, enemies of Christian truth, were once very good expressions to settle a difference of

opinion, to confound an opponent, and stigmatize his character ; but in these degenerate times dispassionate argument is made to do the violent business of abuse in literary discussions, and it is customary to encounter a literary opponent without setting up the war-whoop of infidelity at the onset of the engagement, or of using our pens as we would tomahawks, for the purpose of scalping the victim who has the temerity to differ from us in the complexion of his thoughts.

But there are assertions in the preceding observation to which the author has given the air of facts, and in the manner he has done so, there is an earnestness which is very likely to impose on many, and to render that which is plausible persuasive and convincing. Without a shadow of evidence to support his assertions, or to bear out his opinion, he jumps at the conclusion that it is a self-evident impossi-

bility that religious enthusiasm could have affected Cowper's mind with any morbid hallucinations. The most eloquent of all modern orators has said, " Truth is to be sought only by slow and painful progress ; but error is in its nature flippant and compendious : it hops with airy and fastidious levity over proofs and arguments, and perches upon assertion, which it calls conclusion."

Had Cowper's mind been sane, no rational views of religion could unquestionably have produced the hallucination ; but when his mind was clouded with hypochondria, as in early life before it had taken any definite form, nothing was wanting to convert his melancholy into monomania, and to change the wandering reveries of the former into the settled gloom of the latter, but the exclusive application of enthusiasm to a single subject.

But then chronology and geography are triumphantly appealed to, in order to invalidate this supposition; the former, forsooth, because his first aberration was previously to his having devoted himself to religious meditation. The aberration here alluded to was that which occasioned his removal to the asylum at St. Alban's; but here the author falls into the prevalent error of dating a disease from the period of having recourse to medical assistance. He has lost sight of the aberration which long before that period he laboured under in the Temple, when the terrors of a possible contingency, a public appearance in the House of Lords completely overwhelmed his reason, and caused him to relinquish an appointment on which all his future hopes depended. So much for the appeal to chronology; let us see if the geographical argument is better grounded. Cowper's

calamity “ having befallen him in London, where he had no acquaintance with persons holding the reprobated doctrines of election and sovereign grace,” it is inferred that the insane notion of his perpetual exclusion from divine favour which haunted him at intervals even to the end of his life, was taken up in London when he was supposed to be little, if at all religiously disposed. We have elsewhere said that Cowper was brought up in the very hot-bed of piety, and that early religious impressions are with difficulty ever wholly eradicated from the mind in after life, however little influence they may appear to have upon the conduct in the season of youthful levity. But the calamity, instead of befalling him in London, befell him in Southampton at the period (as he deemed) of his miraculous conversion, but which conversion was unfortunately coupled with the imaginary

commission of “ the unpardonable sin.” Here then is geography likewise at fault: both time and place disprove the assertions they were called on to corroborate, and the simple fact remains irrefragable, that *Cowper was a man of a melancholy temperament, whose mental gloom degenerated into monomania, and that religious enthusiasm was the source of his delusions.*

And in taking leave of this painful subject, we close it with a very sensible observation of Mr. Hayley: “ So wonderfully and fearfully are we made, that man perhaps in all conditions ought to pray that he may never be led to think of spiritual concerns either too little or too much, since human misery is often seen to arise equally from an utter neglect of religious duties, and from a wild extravagance of devotion.”

CHAPTER V.

COWPER CONTINUED.

DURING five years Cowper's dreadful depression continued without any abatement. During this period he was paid unremitting attention by Mrs. Unwin; but her kindness to him was, at length, repaid by a gradual improvement in his health.

Mr. Newton, at this time, was removed from the neighbourhood of Olney; before his departure, however, he triumphed over Cowper's extreme reluctance to see strangers, and suc-

ceeded in installing the Rev. Mr. Bull, a dissenting clergyman, in the acquaintance of his friend.

It is to be regretted, the first use this gentleman made of his influence over the mind of the dejected invalid, was to prevail upon him to translate a collection of spiritual songs from the religious poetry of Madame De Guyon. "If devotional excitement," says his biographer, "had been the cause of Cowper's malady, no recommendation could have been more injudicious."

Most injudicious it undoubtedly was. The French authoress in question was a complete enthusiast. Cowper himself speaks of the necessity he was under of guarding in his translation against the danger of errors, "not fearing," he says, "to represent her as dealing familiarly with God, but foolishly, irreverently, and with-

out due attention to his Majesty, of which she is somewhat guilty.”

He was fortunately induced, however, to employ his leisure in original compositions, and the result was the production of his three great poems.

From the time of his fierce attack in 1773 to his fiftieth year, his malady had the character of a mild melancholy, with occasional paroxysms of a graver nature. At the age of fifty he became an author; but no person, it is observed, ever appeared before the public in that character with less anxiety. “As to the fame, and honour, and glory,” he says in one of his letters, “that may be acquired by poetical feats of any kind, God knows, that if I could lay me down in my grave, with hope at my side, or sit with this companion in a dungeon for the residue of my days, I would cheerfully waive them all.”

In 1782, his friend, Lady Austin, fixed her abode in his neighbourhood, and Cowper became delighted with her society ; his dejection was banished in her company and his health and spirits evidently improved. Lady Austin was precisely the companion he so much needed ; her vivacity, affability, kindness of heart, and mental accomplishments were the qualities that were best calculated to revive the spirits, and soothe the morbid sensibility of the dejected bard.

During his short intercourse with this lady, his mind was in its healthiest state, we are told by Hayley ; and her sprightly and captivating conversation was often the means of rousing him from his fits of melancholy. She was accustomed to play on the harpsichord, to distract his gloomy reveries, and to engage him in the composition of songs, suited to the airs she was

in the habit of playing to him. On one occasion, when she found him in low spirits, she endeavoured to enliven him by reciting the ludicrous story of 'Jonny Gilpin,' which she had heard in childhood; and next morning he informed her that convulsions of laughter, brought on by the recollection of her story, had kept him awake during the greater part of the night, and that he had composed a poem on the subject.

At another time she solicited him to write a poem in blank verse, which he consented to undertake, if she would furnish him with a subject. "You can write upon any thing," said the lady; "why not write upon this sofa?" The command was obeyed, and the world is indebted to Lady Austin for Cowper's production of "The Task," the most pleasing perhaps of his poems. The translation of "Homer" was

likewise undertaken at her suggestion, and partly at Mrs. Unwin's. Thus was he rescued from his misery for a time, by literary occupation, and the mischievous effects of his seclusion mitigated by the society of an amiable and accomplished woman.

Had he found such a companion at an earlier period how different might have been his fate; and had he enjoyed the advantage of such an acquaintance for a longer period, how much wretchedness might he not have been spared! "The accounts," says Mr. Stebbing, "of his situation at this period afford a refreshing contrast to the details of his condition, both in the earlier and later periods of his existence. In the society of a few friends he now divided his time between the pleasures of conversation and the gentle exciting labour of composition. His mind thus gradually assumed a more cheerful cast."

How far Cowper's heart was engaged in the intimacy with Lady Austin is another matter. In his letters to his friends he speaks of her in very guarded terms; but still at times in terms of more than ordinary warmth. That the lady was not indifferent to his merits and amiability is more than probable, and that the tender interest she took in his welfare would have warmed into a stronger attachment, and led to a permanent union there is reason to suspect, had not the feelings and the interests of a third person been opposed to a consummation, that was most devoutly to be wished by every other friend of Cowper.

She had taken a house, adjoining the Unwins, with the intention of making it a permanent abode; but unpleasant circumstances arose which ultimately led to her removal from Olney, and to a final separation from Cowper,

after an uninterrupted intercourse of two years.

The part that Mrs. Unwin took in this affair is differently represented; that she was the cause of the separation there seems to be little doubt, but whether her interference was very blamable is questionable. In common fairness it must be admitted, that the relation in which Cowper stood to this lady, (strictly decorous as their intimacy might have been,) the feelings of Mrs. Unwin were concerned in the business, and had a right to be consulted. That they were consulted by her friend is proved by the result.

Albeit, it is allowed by his biographer, that "he could not entertain the idea of parting with Lady Austin without extreme disquietude; but that immediately on perceiving that separation became necessary for the maintenance of

his own peace, and to ensure the tranquillity of his faithful and long-tried friend, he wisely and firmly, (the wisdom is very doubtful,) took the necessary steps, though at the cost of much mental anguish."

His anguish, however, seems to have been of a very transitory nature, for in a few days after the separation he writes to one of his friends—"We have lost, as you say, a lively and sensible neighbour in Lady Austin; but we have been so long accustomed to a state of retirement within one degree of solitude, and being naturally lovers of still life, we can relapse into our former duality without being unhappy in the change. To me, indeed, a third individual is unnecessary, while I can have the faithful companion I have had these twenty years."

This is certainly a frigid piece of philosophical penmanship. It exhibits a cool mode of

parting with a kind friend, and somewhat of a selfish way of consoling one's self for the loss of an intimate acquaintance, which we can hardly contemplate with pleasure. But nothing throws a stronger light on the morbid state of Cowper's feelings than does this letter. The fact is, his sensibility was acute, but his individual sufferings were too great to enable him to employ it far from home. Had he the sensibility of ten poets, his own great misery was more than sufficient to occupy it all. Lear was in the right, "infirmity" truly "forgets all office," the sick man's affections are swallowed up in the sense of his own bodily afflictions, and pain protracted leads as insensibly to selfish feelings, as does old age.

Cowper, more than any man, one would think, would have been affected by the loss of a bosom friend, or the death of a dear relative ;

yet the death of his father, we are told, preyed less on his spirits than any one could have imagined. We find him at the bed-side of his brother, performing the last duties of a Christian relative, but more in the character of a minister of religion, than of a man occupied by the feelings of fraternal solicitude. And even when the spirit of "his own Mary" is quivering on her lips, we hear of him wrapped up in his own wretchedness, inquiring if there is life still in her body ; and when that life is extinct, paying one visit to the death-chamber, and never more uttering the name of his old companion.

His silence on this occasion, we are well aware, might have proceeded from the intensity of his sorrow ; but it is from the general tenor of his feelings on other similar occasions, the inference is drawn, that Cowper's sen-

sibility was barely sufficient for his own sufferings.

But even had he never laboured under hypochondria, there was a sort of catholicity in his benevolence which embraced mankind with innumerable tendrils, but there was no one branch of affection capable of clinging to a single object, of pressing it to the heart's core, and possessed of sufficient strength, even "in the grasp of death, to hold it fast."

CHAPTER VI.

COWPER CONTINUED.

It should be remembered by those who read the history of the errors of other men of genius by the light of Cowper's virtues, that if he had few vices, he had likewise few strong passions; or if he had the merit of subduing such passions, that seclusion and almost solitude suffered few temptations to cross his path. But it is, nevertheless, questionable whether the qualifications for a monastic institution are essential requisites or advantageous acquire-

ments for society in any Christian country. Hayley, indeed, says that "Nature had given Cowper a warm temperament, but a disappointment of the heart, arising from the cruelty of Fortune, had thrown a cloud on his juvenile spirit; thwarted in love, the natural fire of his temperament turned impetuously into the kindred channel of devotion, and had he been successful in early love, it is probable he might have enjoyed a more uniform and happy tenor of health, but that the smothered flames of passion, uniting with the vapours of constitutional melancholy in the fervour of religious zeal, produced altogether that irregularity in the performance of the bodily and mental functions which gave such extraordinary vicissitudes of splendour and of darkness to his mortal career, and made Cowper at times an idol of the purest admiration, and at times an object of the sincerest pity."

No sooner, however, was he deprived of the society of Lady Austin, than his spirits began to fail, and the loss of her cheerful conversation was followed by a return of his former dejection. He writes to Mr. Newton at this period, “ My heart resembles not the heart of a Christian, mourning and yet rejoicing ; pierced with thorns, yet wreathed about with roses : I have the thorn without the rose. My brier is a wintry one ; the flowers are withered, but the thorn remains. My days are spent in vanity, and it is impossible for me to spend them otherwise.”——“ I should rejoice that the old year is over and gone, if I had not every reason to expect a new one similar to it ; but even the new year is already old in my account. I am not as yet able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest assured, that be they what they may, not one

of them comes the messenger of good to me. If even death itself should be of the number, he is no friend of mine ; for loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a probability of better things to come, were life once ended."

The remainder of this letter puts the character of his mania in a clearer point of view than any other of his epistles. All the peculiarities of monomania are plainly exhibited. On one particular point his reason is clouded, his perceptions distorted, his inferences erroneous. On every other subject he thinks, talks, and acts sanely and sensibly ; he speaks of the certainty of his eternal misery calmly and collectedly. All the " method of madness" is in his language ; in the words of Locke, he "argues rightly on a wrong principle," and endeavours to convince the clergyman to whom he writes,

that the misery of his hypochondria is a mystery of divine ordination, which is physically inexplicable. It is greatly to be suspected that the mode in which this insane idea was combatted by his correspondent, and by most of his religious friends, tended to fix the impression on his mind, and to produce the effect which they desired to avoid.

“ You will tell me,” says poor Cowper, “ that the cold gloom of winter will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it, but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again, but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead is not so: it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time—but no such time is appointed for the *stake* that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself

no dissembler. The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years, in which I have spoken no other language. It is a long time for a man whose eyes were once opened to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit, and such it is in me. My friends, I know, suspect that I shall yet enjoy health again. They think it necessary for the existence of divine truth, that He who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own; and why not in my own? For causes, which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immovable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus?—why crippled and made useless in the church just at the time of life when, my judgment and experience being matured, I might be most use-

ful? Why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of years, there is not enough life left in me to make amends for the years I have lost—till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow? I forestall the answer,—God's ways are mysterious, and he giveth no account of his matters,—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs who use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it will be explained."

Such was Cowper's melancholy frame of mind at this period; and yet immediately after the receipt of the letter we have just quoted, we find Mr. Newton soliciting him to favour the editor of the *Theological Magazine* with occasional essays, and rather reproaching him for not entering upon such subjects, as may be inferred from the reply. "I converse," says poor Cow-

per, “as you say, upon other subjects than despair, and may therefore write upon others. Indeed, my dear friend, I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company; but I will venture to say it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful: I am often so—always indeed when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. You will easily perceive that a mind thus occupied is but indifferently qualified for the consideration of theological matters. The most useful and the most delightful topics of that kind are to me forbidden fruit; I tremble as I approach them. It has happened to me sometimes that I have found myself imperceptibly drawn in, and made a party to such discourse. The consequence has been dissatis-

faction and self-reproach." It is difficult to conceive a more injudicious request than that of Mr. Newton. To set a man to write Theological Essays, who was sinking under the weight of religious despondency, was certainly not the way to alleviate his morbid enthusiasm.

In 1785, his prospects were enlivened by the expectation of a visit from his amiable relative, Lady Hesketh. From the moment Cowper heard of the intention of this lady to visit Olney, the delight he anticipated from the interview is expressed over and over in his letters, in the most joyful terms. "I shall see you again," he writes to her, "I shall hear your voice. We shall take walks together. I will show you my prospects—the hovel, the alcove, the Ouse, and its banks; every thing that I have described." He tells her about the reception he is making

for her in his green-house. “ I line it,” he continues, “ with nets, and spread the floor with mats, and there you shall sit with a bed of mignonette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine, and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. We now talk of nobody but you. And now I have nothing to do but to wish for June—and June, my cousin, never was so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand things to say, and they will all rush into my mind together, till it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter, sooner or later they will all come out. Confidently, and most comfortably, do I hope, that before the fifteenth of June shall present itself we shall have seen each other. Is it not so? And will it not be one of the most

extraordinary eras of my extraordinary life? Joy of heart, from whatever cause it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have even a lasting effect of the most advantageous kind upon them. You must not imagine, neither, that I am on the whole, in any great degree, subject to nervous affections; occasionally I am, and have been these many years, much liable to dejection, but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. *When I am in the best health*, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be."

Who could imagine it was the same Cowper penned this cheerful letter to Lady Hesketh who had written the preceding gloomy epistle to Mr. Newton? but Cowper seems to have suited his spirits to his correspondents, not only on this but on most other occasions; and no greater proof is requisite to show what a powerful influence the habits, feelings, and dispositions of those with whom he was in communion, had upon his mind; and very little doubt can be entertained that the society of such persons as Lady Hesketh, and Lady Austin, and his later friend, Mr. Hayley, might have prevented half the evils which his sequestered way of life, in the solitude of Olney, was the means of bringing on him.

After a separation of twenty-three years, Cowper had the pleasure of beholding Lady Hesketh, and all the delight he anticipated from

the renewal of their acquaintance was realized. "My dear cousin's arrival," he writes to one of his correspondents, "as it could not fail to do, has made us happier than we ever were at Olney. Her great kindness, in giving us her company, is a cordial that I shall feel the effect of, not only while she is here, but while I live."

Lady Hesketh had not long been at Olney before she became dissatisfied with the poet's residence; she thought it a situation altogether unsuitable for a person subject to depression. Cowper himself had often entertained the same opinions regarding it. He speaks of it as a place built for the purposes of incarceration, and that it had served that purpose through a long long period; that they had been prisoners there, but a jail delivery was at hand, and the bolts and bars were about to be loosed.

Lady Hesketh had taken a cottage at Wes-

ton, in a pleasant situation, and he expresses his delight at the prospect of removing to it. “Here,” he says, “we have no neighbourhood—there we shall have much agreeable society. Here we have a bad air, impregnated with theumes of marsh miasmas—there we shall breathe an untainted atmosphere. Here we are confined from September to March—there we shall be on the very verge of pleasure-grounds. Both Mrs. Unwin’s constitution and mine have already suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. We are both, I believe, indebted for our respective maladies to an atmosphere encumbered with raw vapours, and we have, perhaps, fared the worse for sitting so often, and sometimes for several successive months, over a cellar filled with water.

We have lived at Olney till mouldering walls
and a tottering house warned us to depart ; we
have accordingly profited by the hint, and taken
up our abode at Weston.”

CHAPTER VII.

COWPER CONTINUED.

IN this wretched house at Olney, and unwholesome situation, was poor Cowper incarcerated, as he justly terms it, for nearly twenty years. What a situation for the abode of a hypochondriac ! a gloomy house, and an atmosphere tainted with malaria. Little wonder, indeed, is it if the spirits of the sensitive poet sunk under the depressing influence of both : never were the infirmities of a mind like Cowper's fastened upon him all through life, by so many circum-

stances unfavourable to his well-being. No sooner had Lady Hesketh convinced him of the necessity of changing his abode, than his injudicious friends endeavoured to dissuade him from removing. Mr. Newton, among the rest, his biographer informs us, on being apprized of his intended removal from Olney, expressed apprehensions that it would introduce him to company uncongenial to his taste, if not detrimental to his piety. And poor Cowper had the humiliating necessity of writing a long letter to this gentleman, in reply to his objections, that his correspondents and companions were only his near relatives, from whom he was unlikely to catch contamination.

“Your letter,” he says, “to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct, and the offence taken at it in our neighbourhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; if any of our serious neigh-

bours have been astonished, they have been so without the slightest occasion. Poor people are never well employed when they are occupied in judging one another; but when they undertake to scan the motives of those whom Providence has raised a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which in fact it never does."

The humiliating task of replying to such trivial accusations as those of Mr. Newton on this occasion, must have been irksome and annoying, even to so amiable a man as Cowper; but the futile charge, and the simple, though dignified, reply to it, are ample illustrations of the difference between a narrow and a noble mind.

In the beginning of 1787, Cowper was visited with another severe paroxysm of his mental disorder, which for more than six months suspended his translation of Homer, on which he had been for some time deeply occupied, and precluded the conversation of those with whom he was intimately associated. In his letters to his cousin he describes the first symptoms of his attack. "I have had a little nervous fever lately, that has somewhat abridged my sleep; and though I find myself better than I have been since it seized me, yet I feel my head lightish, and not in the best order for writing."

During this attack he continued shut up in the solitude of his chamber, refusing to see any human being but his kind attendant. In the autumn, however, his health and spirits were so far restored as to enable him to resume his correspondence. Speaking of his sufferings

at this time, he says, "My head has been the worst part of me, and still continues so,— it is subject to giddiness and pain; maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment."

It is well worthy of observation, that in this and every other similar attack of his dreadful depression, head-ache and giddiness are spoken of as the premonitory symptoms of his disorder. But it does not appear that local depletion, or any other effective means, were ever resorted to, to obviate or prevent his sufferings, which were evidently the effects of determination of blood to the head, or probably the chronic effects of that determination—of effusion and pressure on the brain—the not unlikely source of all his miserable feelings. On one of these occasional attacks, the composition of theological essays are recommended to him; on another, the

translation of spiritual songs; on another, the production of a volume of original hymns; but at any of these periods the services of a cupper, and the judicious care of a physician, might have proved of more advantage.

He had scarcely recovered from his late illness, before the Rev. Mr. Bull imitated the example of Mr. Newton, and importuned the unfortunate bard to compose a set of hymns for particular occasions. "Ask possibilities," replied poor Cowper, "and they shall be performed; but ask not hymns from a man suffering with despair as I do. I would not sing the Lord's song, were it to save my life, banished as I am, not to a strange land, but to a remoteness from his presence, in comparison to which, the distance from east to west is no distance, but vicinity and cohesion. I dare not, either

in prose or verse, allow myself either to express a frame of mind, which I am conscious does not belong to me."

Lady Hesketh remained at Weston the greater part of two years, contributing greatly to revive the drooping spirits of Cowper, and to encourage him to complete the vast undertaking of Homer's translation. At the approach of January, 1790, he appears to have relapsed into his dejection: he had a superstitious terror of this month, and he never could get over the idea that some dreadful calamity in this month was always impending. On the whole, however, during the time he was occupied with his Homer he adverts less frequently in his letters to his gloomy feelings than he had formerly done. He speaks to one of his correspondents, of his sufferings, only as singularities which might surprise him if he knew

them. "I must say, however," he adds, "in justice to myself, that they would not lower me in your good opinion, though perhaps they might tempt you to question the soundness of my upper story."

In the beginning of 1791, he had another attack of what he calls his nervous fever, a disorder which he dreaded above all others, because it was invariably followed by a melancholy perfectly insupportable. Soon after the publication of his *Homer*, a literary correspondence with Mr. Hayley led to a personal acquaintance with that gentleman. He was then in his sixty-first year, and Hayley says he appeared to feel none of the infirmities of advanced life, but was active and vigorous both in mind and body. And speaking of the affectionate veneration and kindness of Mrs. Unwin for the poet, it was hardly possible, he says,

to survey human nature in a more touching and a more satisfactory point of view.

In January, 1794, in that gloomy month which he always spoke of with such terror, his sad forebodings were at last realized. A severer attack of his malady than any he had yet experienced overwhelmed his spirits, and almost wholly paralysed his mental powers. His despair became permanent, and continued unmitigated through the remainder of his life. Nothing could be now more desolate than his situation. Mrs. Unwin had been reduced to a state of second childhood by a paralytic affection, and poor Cowper shunned the sight of every other person except the individual who was incapable of rendering him any assistance. For some time he had refused food of every kind, except now and then a very small piece of toasted bread, dipped generally in water,

sometimes mixed with a little wine; at length, however, he was induced to sit down to his ordinary meals, but he persisted in refusing to take even the medicines that were indispensably required, and strongly urged upon him. At this period the famous Dr. Willis was consulted by Lady Hesketh on the subject of his malady, and at the instance of Lord Thurlow this eminent physician was induced to visit the invalid at Weston, but no amelioration ensued; his disorder at the time was beyond the reach of art. He continued in the same distressing state till the summer of 1795, when change of scene and air was recommended, both for him and Mrs. Unwin, and they were accordingly conducted by his kind relative, Mr. Johnson, to a village on the Norfolk coast, and from this place they were removed to his own residence, and subsequently to a cottage within a few

miles of Swaffham. These little changes were somewhat beneficial to Cowper, though his dejection continued unabated. He suffered Mr. Johnson to read to him several works of an amusing tendency, but nothing could induce him to resume his pen, not even for the revision of his favourite Homer. But a stratagem was tried by Mr. Johnson to rouse his attention; he placed a volume of Wakefield's new edition of Pope's translation on a table in a room through which Cowper had to pass, and the plan was not without success. He discovered, the next day, that Cowper had not only found those passages in which there was a comparison between Pope's translation and his own, but had corrected several of his lines at the suggestion of the critic. From this time Cowper regularly engaged in a revisal of his own version, and for some weeks produced almost sixty

new lines a day. His friends began to entertain hopes of his recovery, but they were of short duration, for in a few weeks he relapsed into his former misery.

CHAPTER VIII.

COWPER CONTINUED.

IN the following December, his old and faithful companion, Mrs. Unwin, was taken from him. This most amiable and pious woman died, in the seventy-second year of her age, and was buried in Dereham Church, where a marble tablet was raised to the memory of Mary—the beloved Mary of Cowper. The day before she expired, he sat a considerable time in her apartment, and though he appeared to the attendants so absorbed in his own wretchedness

as to take hardly any notice of her condition, it was evident he was aware of her approaching dissolution; for the next morning, when the servant was opening the window of his chamber, he said to her in a plaintive tone, "Sally, is there life above stairs?" He saw the dying woman for the last time about an hour before she expired. "In the dusk of the evening," says Hayley, "he attended Mr. Johnson to survey the corpse, and after looking at it for a few moments, he started suddenly away with a vehement but unfinished sentence of passionate sorrow. He spoke of her no more."

From the anguish he would have felt on this melancholy occasion, he was so far preserved, continues Hayley, by the marvellous state of his own disturbed health, that instead of mourning the loss of a person, in whose life he had seemed to live, all perception of that loss was

mercifully taken from him, and from the moment when he hurried away from the inanimate object of his filial attachment, he appeared to have no memory of her having existed, for he never asked a question concerning her funeral, nor even mentioned her name. Amongst other pious and learned individuals who charitably attempted, though personally unknown to him, to revive his dejected spirits, and to reason with him on the subject of the unfortunate notion which had taken possession of his mind, was the Bishop of Llandaff: he endeavoured, says his biographer, evangelically to cheer and invigorate the mind of Cowper; but the depression of that mind was the effect of bodily disease, so obstinate, that it received not the slightest relief.

By frequent change of scenery, and the incessant attentions of Mr. Johnson he was

sometimes roused to a little mental exertion—so much so as to write without solicitation to Lady Hesketh; and though his letter is the very essence of despair, yet is it apparently the production of a mind sane on every subject but the melancholy one that overwhelmed him.

In plain language, it was the letter of a monomaniac. “You describe,” he says, “delightful scenes, but you describe them to one who, if he even saw them, could receive no delight from them—who has a faint recollection, and so faint as to be like an almost forgotten dream, that once he was susceptible of pleasure from such causes. The country that you have had in prospect has always been famed for its beauties; but the wretch who can derive no gratification from a view of nature, even under the disadvantage of her most ordinary dress,

will have no eyes to admire her in any. In one day, in one minute, I should rather have said, nature became an universal blank to me; yet with an effect as difficult to remove as blindness itself."

The sudden attack of his malady, as it is described in this letter, which Hayley ascribes to a scorbutic affection, is immediately attributable to sudden determination to the brain, or pressure on that organ, and certainly might be remotely ascribed to the cause which his biographer has assigned. If there be any truth in Spurzheim's theory of the separate and distinct existence of the cerebral organs which are supposed to be the seat of the individual faculties of the mind, how much light does that theory throw on the nature of monomania, which is certainly inexplicable on any other hypothesis, and how easy is it to conceive the injury

that may be done to a particular organ without involving the whole apparatus of the mind in general confusion. In what narrow limits does it circumscribe the difference between monomania and madness, between the effects of a partial and a general disorder of the mental faculties ! One of the strange circumstances, in cases of mental aberration which not unfrequently occurs, is an improvement in the bodily health of the sufferer, when the infirmities of the mind become permanently confirmed. Cowper's general health, at this period, was not only improved, but his bodily vigor was greater than it had been for years. In the instance of Smart, Dr. Johnson observed the same phenomenon : after visiting him in Bedlam, he speaks of his incurable insanity ; but poor Smart, he says, had grown fat upon it since he had last seen him. Cowper's disorder, however, had not

so entirely overpowered his faculties, but that in the midst of his deepest melancholy he was able to employ himself at intervals in literary pursuits. His last original production was "The Cast-away," a poem of considerable merit, but too plainly illustrative of his own misery. "The only amusement that he appeared to have admitted, without reluctance," says Hayley, "was the reading of Mr. Johnson, who, indefatigable in the supply of such amusement, had exhausted an immense collection of novels, and at this time began reading to the poet his own works. To these he listened in silence, and heard all his pieces recited in order, till the reader arrived at the history of John Gilpin, which he begged him not to proceed with." At length, however, his strength began to break down—a complication of new maladies had set in. A dropsical appearance in his legs

was observed: medical advice was now had recourse to, but it was with the greatest difficulty the sufferer could be persuaded to take the remedies that had been prescribed. His weakness rapidly increased. On the 19th of April, Mr. Johnson, apprehensive of his immediate dissolution, ventured to speak to him on the subject. He consoled, or endeavoured to console him with the prospect of an approaching eternity of peace and happiness, of the just grounds for his dependance on the merits of the Redeemer; but poor Cowper passionately entreated of him to desist from any further observations of a similar kind, clearly proving, says his biographer, that though he was on the eve of being invested with celestial light, the darkness of delusion still veiled his spirit. The three following days his debility continued to increase. The last words he uttered were ad-

dressed to his attendant, when pressed to put some refreshment to his lips—"What can it signify?" On the 3rd of May, 1800, he calmly expired, in his sixty-ninth year, and was interred in the same church where the remains of his "Mary" were deposited.

Briefly as we have sketched the sad history of this most amiable, highly gifted, but most unhappy of the children of genius, enough has been said to render any commentary on the sufferings we have had to speak of unnecessary. We have endeavoured to divest his malady of the obscurity and mystery in which it has been involved; we have called it by its proper name; we have referred it to its true cause, and endeavoured to point out how far his symptoms were aggravated by the counsel and conversation of injudicious people, and how far his symptoms were suffered to develope themselves and to ac-

quire strength, by an unfortunate and perpetual concurrence of most unfavourable circumstances. The leading events in the history of his sufferings, so far as they concerned his health and consequently his happiness, may be summed up in a very few words. Cowper, from his earliest years, was delicate in constitution, and timid in his disposition. Excessive application to professional studies in the Temple increased the delicacy of his health, the nervous system and the cerebral organs became disturbed or disordered in their functions, and his natural timidity merged into a morbid sensibility which wholly disqualified him for the active duties of that profession in which he had been so improperly placed. The derangement of his health obliged him to go to the sea-coast; he visited Southampton, and in one of his walks the unexpected spectacle of a magnificent prospect, and

the sudden appearance of a burst of sunshine in all the "uncertain glories of an April day," overpowered his imagination, and filled his heart with a rapture of devotional enthusiasm. The splendour of the scene was taken for the effulgence of the Deity, and the wrapt spectator believed that the vision was expressly intended for a merciful warning to lead him to the remembrance of that Being, whom, in his friend's words, he had been living without in the world. He returned to town, the momentary excitement passed away, and the warning was forgotten—a public appointment was procured for him, but the terror of a public appearance at the bar of the House of Lords completely overwhelmed him, and he was obliged to renounce his employment. His nervous disorder returned with increased strength; he became the victim of hypochondria, and his friends deemed it necessary

to place him under the care of Dr. Cottin. During the time that he remained in this private asylum, his condition appears to have been similar to that of Dr. Johnson in his early life, his dejection as severe, but certainly not more so, and no indication, even in his worst moments of general insanity. His improvement in health and spirits at length led to his removal to a country village, and here he became domiciled in the family of a clergyman, in which he continued for the remainder of his life. The character of the society into which he was thrown was exclusively serious, or what is called evangelical. The story of the miraculous vision at Southampton was told to his friends, and the importance which was attached, and the credit that was given to it, fixed the impression stronger than ever on his mind, that it was a divine warning, and that he had neglected it.

Repentance, indeed, ensued, and remorse followed so closely upon it, that the latter took possession of all the faculties of his mind, and permanently, though partially, disordered it. The dreadful idea became fixed, that in rejecting that warning he had committed the unpardonable sin, and that there was no hope for him here or hereafter. This was the commencement of his monomania : the disorder of his nervous system which had previously been only the derangement of the functions of that system, now probably proceeded to the disease of the organ itself, and all the after circumstances of his life and the tenor of his conversation with those around him, with few exceptions, were unfortunately calculated to fix the idea which preponderated in his mind over every other thought. That, under happier circumstances, and with due attention to the digestive

organs, Cowper might have been rescued from the misery he endured through life, there is every reason to believe, and that, like Johnson, he might have acquired the power of “managing his mind,” and even of “mastering its ailments” to a great extent. But all through his disorder, the digestive organs were impaired and neglected; to use the words of his biographer, “the process of digestion never passed regularly in his frame during the years he resided in Norfolk;”—and this little paragraph is the essence of the “history and mystery” of Cowper’s malady. This was indeed the true source of his hypochondria; and to whatever gulf the torrent of his dejection might have flowed, whether of insanity or eccentricity, religious enthusiasm was but the tributary stream which found a ready channel to receive its troubled waters. The original current might indeed

have swelled with their increase, till the banks of reason were broken down by its aggravated fury; but the source of the mischief must be traced to the fountain-head, not to the feeble stream that fed its violence.

CHAPTER IX.

BYRON.

THAT tax of censure which is laid on the eminence of genius, has been pretty rigidly enforced in all ages, and in all countries; but of late years it has fallen more heavily than usual on literary men. The privilege of levying this odious impost on private habits, for the public entertainment, has become a vested right, and no man's memory is entitled to immortality till his character has been duly cudgelled, to extract the last particle of earthly dross, in order to qualify it, by this purgatorial

process, for its future happiness ; so that, even in these times, there is a species of killing which is no murder, and of taxation which is no tyranny. Whatever Lord Milton may think on the subject of other taxes, there is no withholding of this particular one, on eminence—there is no stopping the public supplies of scandal, for there are no other means of satisfying the public creditor—curiosity. But, if ever there was a man's memory entitled to a discharge in full of all demands upon his character, that man's memory is Lord Byron's.

Eight years have hardly elapsed since his death, and year after year, with unprecedented avidity, the public have swallowed lives, last days, recollections, conversations, notices, and journals, professing to delineate his character ; and the last effort of biography commands as much attention as the first. And yet, with all

the lights those various volumes have shed upon his peculiarities, how is it that, with many, his character still remains a problem? No man's errors were ever more closely observed by his best friends, nor more carefully recorded by his worst enemies. No man's vices were ever less effectually palliated by the partiality of his biographers, nor his virtues, except in a single instance, more cautiously admitted by his *soi-disant* admirers. The fact is, Byron had few, if any friends, amongst his intimate acquaintances. It is only in domestic life that kindness of heart redeems unevenness of temper, but in literary friendship there is no love superior to the caprice of a sullen disposition, or the sallies of a satirical one. The greatest defect in Byron's character was a propensity to ridicule his absent friends; a biting jest was never lost, at any expense of violated friendship. Poor

Parry's "love of brandy," Moore's "love of lords," Leigh Hunt's "*rimini piminis*," and even Galt, "the last person in the world on whom any one would commit literary larceny," are specimens of the raillery which abound in his letters; and there are few, if any, of the friends who have become his biographers, who did not suffer from it. The easy and natural absurdity which he had the power of throwing over the subjects of his ridicule, is apparently free from any malevolent design; but who can doubt that the subjects of the best humoured raillery are not pained by its infliction, and however they may affect to laugh at the annoyance, that they are not secretly chagrined, and that their affections are not insensibly estranged by such ridicule? It would be too much to suppose that Byron's conduct to his friends excited no soreness of feeling in his biographers, however

incapable they might be of magnifying his errors. However desirous they might be to “exaggerate nothing, or set down aught in malice,” it is greatly to be suspected that the remembrance of these injuries had much to do with the recollection of his frailties, and that the latter would never have been so prominently set before the public eye, had their memories not been refreshed by their offended feelings. Byron might well say to Lady Blessington, when deploring the loss of some early friends, “But perhaps it is as well that they are gone; it is less bitter to mourn their death than to have to regret their alienation, and who knows that had they lived they might have become as faithless as those that I have known? Experience has taught me that the only friends we can call our own, who can know no change, are those over whom the grave has closed—the seal

of death is the only seal of friendship." With such sad experience he might well anticipate the fate his memory had to suffer; for, like Pope, he had reason to apprehend the common fortune of extraordinary geniuses, "to be more admired by their friends than to be loved." This observation is, however, by no means applicable to the feelings of Moore for his noble friend. He seems to have set about the life of Byron with no other motive, but a sincere desire to do justice to his memory; yet it is a matter of doubt, whether the character of the latter has suffered more from the open uncompromising hostility of Hunt, or from the fatal candour and the unsuccessful palliation of Moore. Few, we believe, rise from the perusal of the former gentleman's volume with a changed opinion of Byron's kind-hearted disposition, but very many, we believe, carry away a fixed impression from

the work of the latter, of the inordinate vanity and egotism of the victim of the poetic temperament. Public opinion may be erroneous and prejudiced for a season, but ultimately the power of truth is certain to prevail over all its mistaken views of things and persons, and "even-handed justice is sure to commend the ingredients of the poisoned cup" of criticism back to its own envenomed lips. But there is more danger of prejudice taking root when the sincerity of the effort to remove it is beyond suspicion. The fidelity of Moore, as a biographer, and his affection for Lord Byron, no one questions; and therefore, any failure in the palliation of the errors he so minutely details, is attributed rather to the difficulty of the task, than to the injudiciousness of the mode of undertaking it. Byron may have been all that which Moore represents him to have been, (not

indeed in so many specific words, but in the inference he has left his readers to draw from the documents he has set before them,)—inconstant, vain, irascible, sarcastic, and dissolute, altogether an indifferent man, and a very aristocratic lord; but surely “the poetic temperament” is no sufficient shield to fling before the face of so many large defects; or, if there be any advantage in it as a protection to error against the censure of its assailants, the name at all events is an absurdity, for the “poetic temperament” means nothing more than a peculiar constitutional state, arising from a predominant passion for poetry, and implying certain evils peculiar to the cultivation of that particular art. But the evils in question are not peculiar to any branch of literary pursuits; they belong not exclusively to poetry, but to every species of intellectual labour, too long continued, or

too intensely followed, and the result is a state of morbid sensibility, arising from bodily disease. But, in the biography of Byron, the origin of his morbid sensibility is referred not to its true cause; we are simply told that his temperament was a poetic one, and that it was unfavourable to the due performance of his social and domestic duties. It is, however, only by tracing either physical or moral phenomena to their remote origins, that any intelligible idea can be formed of them. Moore has indeed recorded, and seems to have delighted in recording, every thing that was good in Byron's character; but has he not given an immortality to his frailties which no other person had the means of giving them? Has he not made the anatomy of his melancholy a public demonstration of trivial errors—a minute dissection of all those infirmities which no one but a friend could have

been familiar with? "He best can paint them who has felt the most."

The public had a right to expect such a general outline of his private history as might illustrate his character, and manifest its influence on his writings; but if literary curiosity demanded more, it deserved not the gratification of its morbid appetite. A fondness for literary gossip has grown up of late years; biographers must cater for it, and in their calling they may imagine they are honestly contributing to the public entertainment when they are pandering to its sickly taste. It is surprising how the moral public may suffer the severity of its decorum to be softened down by a delicate detail even of outrages on delicacy itself. Names, it is said, are not things, but it is a foolish saying; a liaison of Byron's with an Italian countess is a very different thing from

the profligacy of an actor, with the lady of an alderman; and may be illustrated by letters of no common tenderness, and yet be read without any impropriety.

The amours of Lord Byron, in royal quarto, are indeed very different from the exploits of Don Juan in duodecimo, and splendid sins are equally distinct from low-lived errors. Far be it from us to quarrel with the tolerating spirit of society; but the errors of Lord Byron, however they may be designated, and however diligently collected and recorded, are not likely to receive any general immunity from public charity, perhaps at least for half a century to come.

CHAPTER X.

BYRON CONTINUED.

THE biographer of a man like Byron is often little aware of the difficulty of the task he undertakes. It is one of the common eccentricities of genius to mystify its character for the capricious pleasure of bewildering the observation of those who are most familiar with its privacy. "It cannot be denied," says Galt, "that there was an innate predilection in the mind of Lord Byron to mystify every thing about himself." If such was the case, how difficult was it for

those who imagined themselves in his confidence to form a just opinion of his character, and how likely was the superficial observer to estimate his sentiments by his mode of conversing on any subject that he was wont to play with ! If a literary man of celebrity converses without any restraint or affectation of singularity, even with his intimate acquaintances, he is fearful of endangering his confidence and diminishing the respect of his private circle. If Johnson had not been in the habit of perplexing Boswell by the paradoxical opinions he so gravely and sententiously maintained, the veneration of the latter might have declined in a ratio with the facility of comprehending the oracles of his idol.

Burns, long before intemperance disordered his sensibility, was accustomed to astonish his correspondents at the expense of his character, by affecting remorse for imaginary errors, and

by magnifying common cares into overwhelming troubles.

Pope, we are told by Johnson, in the prime of life courted notoriety, by playing the fictitious part of a misanthrope before it became him; and even Swift was constrained to tell him he had not yet suffered or acted enough in the world to become weary of it.

“The melancholy Cowley” had a similar propensity for visionary persecutions, and imaginary amours. “No man,” says his biographer, “need squander his life in voluntary dreams or fictitious occurrences; the man that sits down to suppose himself charged with treason or peculation, and beats his mind to an elaborate purgation of his character from crimes which he was never within the possibility of committing, differs only in the unfrequency of his folly, from him who praises beauty which

he never saw, and complains of jealousy which he never felt."

Byron, in his early eagerness for notoriety, affected singularity so strongly, that by dint of deceiving others, he actually became the dupe of his own delusions. Day after day he alludes in his journal to the recurrence of a dream, whose horrors would seem to be the fitting companions of the terrors of a murderer. "I awoke from a dream—well, have not others dreamed? Such a dream—but she did not overtake me! I wish the dead would rest for ever. Ugh! how my blood chilled—I do not like this dream! I hate its foregone conclusion!"

In another page:—"No dreams last night of the dead or the living. So I am 'firm as the marble founded on the rock, till the next earthquake."

Elsewhere, speaking of the "Bride of Abydos," he says, "It was written in four days to distract my dreams from * * *; were it not thus it had never been composed: and had I not done something at the time, I must have gone mad by eating my own heart—bitter diet."

In another place, speaking of the most tragical of his poems,—“Had it not been for Murray it would never have been published, though the circumstances which are the groundwork of it—heigh ho!”

Alluding to his state of mind at this period, he says, “My ostensible temper is certainly improved, but I must shudder, and must to my latest hour regret the consequences of it, and my passions combined. One event—but no matter; there are others not much better to think of also—to them I give the preference. But I hate dwelling upon incidents; my tem-

per is now under management, rarely loud, and when loud, never deadly."

Even at seventeen the rage for fictitious misery was upon him :

" Oh memory, torture me no more,

The present's all o'ercast ;

My hopes of future bliss are o'er,

In mercy veil the past."

Such are the lines of a boy at seventeen.

In Stendhal's account of Byron in the " Foreign Literary Gazette," in speaking of the poet's fictitious remorse, he asks, " Is it possible that Byron might have had some guilty stain upon his conscience, similar to that which wrecked Othello's fame? Can it be, have we sometimes exclaimed, that in a frenzy of pride or jealousy he had shortened the days of some fair Grecian slave faithless to her vows? Be

this as it may, (he adds,) a great man once known, may be said to have opened an account with posterity?—Such questions can no longer be injurious but to them who have given them birth. After all, is it not possible that his conscience might have only exaggerated some youthful error?”

The just and charitable conclusion of the foreigner will be admitted by most people; some there may be who have a character for malignant consistency to preserve, and may therefore withhold that charity from the memory which they denied to the living man. “It may not be wondered at if those who have exhausted a world of common crimes should now “imagine new,” or still invest the character of Byron with every sombre hue which he gave to his own heroes.

The recklessness, however, of his capricious

nature furnished his enemies with this weapon against himself, in seeking to impersonate his own errors, or the crimes which others attributed to him, and affecting to stand before the world in all the dark Murillo-tints of his own fancy—

“Himself the dark original he drew.”

This weakness of endeavouring to appear to others worse than we really are, is a species of simulation, first practised for its singularity, but which ultimately becomes so fixed a habit as almost to border on insanity. Poets and religious enthusiasts are peculiarly prone to this apparent self-abasement ; the fervid zeal of Cowper, the inspiration of Byron, tended to the same excitement of imagination, the same exaggerated views of their own errors. The fanatic feels a spiritual pride in humiliating humanity and himself, before an admiring multitude,

the poet recreates his fancy in bewildering the world with the marvellous anomalies in his character. But even while he affects to immolate his vanity, self is ever the God of his idolatry; and whatever obloquy he may pretend to cast upon the idol, he still abjures it "with a certain loving respect," and even in his anxiety to be thought sincere, though he fling the censor at the head of the effigy he repudiates, it is only in order that the incense may ascend the higher. In a word, Byron's nature had no more to do with the misanthropy his gloomy mind delighted to depict, than Milton's humanity had to do with the malignity of the devils which it was the solace of his leisure so sublimely to describe. We doubt if the personal dispositions of an author are much more discernible in the productions of his imagination,

than the qualities of an actor are discoverable in the characters he assumes.

“Is the moralist,” says D’Israeli, “a moral man? Is he malignant who publishes satires? Is he a libertine who composes loose poems? And is he whose imagination delights in terrors and in blood, the very monster he paints?” A reference to the dissimilar character of men and authors, furnishes a reply to each question. “La Fontaine,” he tells us, “wrote tales fertile in intrigues, yet has not left a single amour on record. Many of Smollet’s descriptions were not only prurient but indelicate, yet his character was immaculate. Cowley loved to boast of the variety of his mistresses, but wanted the courage to address one.” A living poet has left Catullus in the shade, and yet proved the most constant of husbands; and yet on the other hand, behold “Seneca, an usurer of seven

millions, writing on moderate desires. Sallust declaiming against the licentiousness of his age, yet accused in the senate of habitual debaucheries. Demosthenes, recommending the virtues of his ancestors, yet incapable, says Plutarch, of imitating them. Sir Thomas Moore preaching toleration, yet in practice a fierce persecutor. Young constantly condemning preferment, and yet all his life pining after it, the most sombrous of poets, yet a most trivial punster." For the vagaries of the tragic and comic muse, we have but to glance at Rowe, stalking solemnly in sock and buskin, and yet, according to Spence, laughing all day long, and doing nothing else but laugh. And Moliere, the first of comedians, setting the theatre in a roar, yet decorous, even to gravity, in private life. These instances may serve to throw a little light on the dissimilar character of the

author, as he presents himself before us in his literary robe, and the private individual in the every-day dress of common life. And they may also serve to show the fictitious nature of Byron's misanthropic self-drawn character.

CHAPTER XI.

BYRON CONTINUED.

It now remains to show how far the character of Byron was influenced by disease, and what the nature of that disease was. That he laboured under a specific malady, which gravely affected the mental faculties, and influenced, if it did not determine, his conduct on very many occasions, is a fact as obvious as his defects; yet strange to say, the existence of such a malady is very little known, and has never been distinctly pointed out. His symptoms have indeed been noticed under various names, when pro-

ductive of any extraordinary and palpable effect, but they have been so indefinitely described, that nothing but medical investigation is competent to a solution of the difficulties they present. In one place we read of his being subject to an hysterical affection, in another of his being carried out of a theatre in a convulsive swoon; elsewhere, of an apoplectic tendency, attended with temporary deprivation of sense and motion; at another time, of nervous twitches of the features, and the limbs following any emotion of anger, and, from trivial excitement, and slight indisposition, of temporary aberrations of intellect, and delirium; but no where do we find the cause of these phenomena plainly and intelligibly pointed out, nor the real name given to his disorder, till his last and fatal attack. The simple fact is, he laboured under an epileptic diathesis, and on

several occasions of mental emotion, even in his early years, he had slight attacks of this disease. If feelings of delicacy induced his biographers to conceal a truth they were aware of, or deemed it better to withhold, their motive was unquestionably a good one; but it was nevertheless a mistaken delicacy; for there are no infirmities so humiliating to humanity as those irregularities of conduct in eminent individuals; and the only palliation they admit of is often precluded by our ignorance of the bodily disorders under which they may have laboured.

Epilepsy (so called from the suddenness of its seizure) was termed by the ancients "the sacred disease," "from its affecting the noblest part of the rational creature." Aretæus says, because it was imagined, that some demon had entered into the man; and this is the doctrine and the prevailing opinion of the vulgar, in

many countries, even to the present day. This disorder is sometimes symptomatic of irritation in some other part of the body: more especially in the stomach, inducing a temporary plethoric state of the blood-vessels of the head, and by pressure on that organ producing sudden deprivation of sense, attended with convulsions.

It is called idiopathic when regarded as a primary disease arising from some specific injury to the brain, caused by some internal irritation, a spicula of bone, a tumor, or effusion, the consequence of which is, a recurrence of the paroxysms at certain intervals. In both forms the presence of convulsions is the circumstance which distinguishes epilepsy from apoplexy—and this merits attention, for both maladies, in their milder shapes, are frequently confounded: (this was the case in Byron's instance, more than once.)

The symptomatic form of epilepsy was that which Byron most probably laboured under: it is often hereditary, and the predisposition to it renders the two extremes of a plethoric and a debilitated habit equally productive of its attacks. There is much reason to suspect that Byron's was an hereditary taint, and was derived from his unhappy-tempered mother. An epileptic tendency is very frequently associated with partial mania. Dr. Mead says, that "after an epilepsy often comes on madness of a long standing, *for these diseases are very nearly related.*" Little is known of the early history of Mrs. Byron, but quite enough of the extraordinary violence of her temper, and its effects upon her health after any sudden explosion of choler, to warrant the belief that some cerebral disease occasioned that degree of excitability

which is quite unparalleled in the history of any lady of sane mind.

With such a temperament, if we hear of her falling into fits after the occurrence of any violent emotion, although nothing of their nature may be told, there is great cause to suspect that an epileptic diathesis might have tended to their production.

On one occasion we are told by Moore, that at the Edinburgh theatre she was so affected by the performance, that she fell into violent fits, and was carried out of the theatre screaming loudly. At all events, whether Byron's epileptic diathesis was hereditary or not, the question of its existence is beyond dispute; he had no regular recurrence of its paroxysms like those that belong to a confirmed case of the primary form of this disease; his seizures were generally slight, occasioned by mental emotion

or constitutional debility, induced by the alternate extremes of intemperance and abstemiousness. In boyhood, the most trivial accident was capable of producing sudden deprivation of sense and motion. On one occasion, a cut on the head produced what he calls a "downright swoon;" a similar effect was the consequence of a tumble in the snow at another time. In later life, the same constitutional tendency is to be observed. One evening, on the lake of Geneva with Mr. Hobhouse, an oar striking his shin caused another of those "downright swoons:" he calls the sensation "a very odd one, a sort of grey giddiness first, then nothingness and total loss of memory" At Bologna, in 1819, he describes one of his attacks in one of his letters in these terms: "Last night I went to the representation of Alfieri's *Mirra*, the last two acts of which threw me into convulsions; I

do not mean by that word a lady's hysterics, but an agony of reluctant tears, and the choking shudder which I do not often undergo for fiction."

This attack appears to have been of a graver nature than the description of it implies, for a fortnight after we find him complaining of its effects. He was seized with a similar fit at witnessing Kean in Sir Giles Overreach, and was carried out of the theatre in strong convulsions.

At Ravenna, in 1821, on some occasion of annoyance, he says he flew into a paroxysm of rage which had all but caused him to faint.

And the same year, complaining of the effects of indigestion, he says, "I remarked in my illness a complete inaction and destruction of my chief mental faculties; I tried to rouse them, but could not—and this is the soul. I should believe that it was married to the body, if they did not sympathize so much with each other."

Ellis, the American artist, alludes to a convulsive and tremulous manner of drawing in a long breath as one of his peculiarities; and we are informed by Lady Blessington, whose accurate observation of Byron's character we have reason to place great dependance upon, that any casual annoyance gave not only his face, but his whole frame, a convulsive epileptic character. In 1823, in speaking of an indisposition of his daughter, caused by a determination of blood to the head, he told Dr. Kennedy it was a complaint to which he himself was subject; and Moore justly observes, that there was in Byron's state of health at that time, the seeds of the disorder of which he afterwards died. The details of the last attack of epilepsy which preceded his dissolution are more minutely described than any former illness. "He was sitting," says Galt, "in Colonel Stanhope's room, talking

jestingly with Captain Parry, according to his wonted manner, when his eyes and forehead discovered that he was agitated by strong feelings, and on a sudden he complained of weakness in one of his legs, then rose, but finding himself unable to walk, he called for aid, and immediately fell into a violent convulsion, and was placed on a bed. While the fit lasted, his face was hideously distorted, but in a few minutes the convulsion ceased, and he began to recover his senses ; his speech returned, and he soon rose apparently well. During this struggle his strength was preternaturally augmented, and when it was over, he behaved with his usual firmness." This was on the 19th of February, and on the 19th of April he was a corpse.

Here are all the symptoms of epilepsy regularly detailed ; the nature of the attack is not to be mistaken, and it leaves the character of the

preceding ones, however slightly manifested, in little doubt. It has been already stated that the seat of this disorder is in the brain, while the source of the excitement which leads to it is frequently in the stomach. The injury done to the latter by violent transitions from intemperate habits to rigid abstemiousness, by an ill-judged regimen and excessive mental exertion, could not fail to call into activity the dormant malady to which he was predisposed, and when so eliminated to aggravate its symptoms.

CHAPTER XII.

BYRON CONTINUED.

OF all these symptoms, the earliest, the most constant, and yet, generally, the most misunderstood, is melancholy. This is not the place to treat of its anatomy; every one who has lived *sibi et musis*, whose days for any length of time have been spent in study, whose vigils have been devoted to books, sooner or later must be acquainted with it. There is something in literature of a sacred, yet sombre character, which diffuses a pleasing melancholy over the mind, so

insensibly progressive, that one is scarcely aware of its effects before he becomes its victim. If a predisposition to any cerebral disease is latent in his constitution, how insidiously his spirits are undermined, and how surely does melancholy degenerate into the morbid sensibility of confirmed hypochondria ! For, such a man society has no charms; he makes a merit of his aversion from social intercourse, he prides himself on being independent of the frivolous amusements of the world. His self-concentration causes him to think his mind is all-sufficient for his individual felicity, and a refined selfishness becomes the most prominent feature of his isolated feelings. He persuades himself, like Thomson, that “a serene melancholy is the most noble and the most agreeable situation of the mind.” It is in vain to argue with him on the danger of indulging this depressing passion.

He will tell you perhaps, in the language of Rogers,

“ You may call it madness, folly ;

You cannot chase my gloom away ;

There’s such a charm in melancholy,

I would not, if I could, be gay.”

Of all writers, old Burton has given the most graphic description of this “*amabilis insania*,” as he is pleased to call it. “Melancholy,” says our quaint author, “is that irrevocable gulf to which voluntary solitariness gently leads us, like a syren ; it is most pleasant at first, to those who are given to this passion, to keep their chamber, or to walk alone in some secluded grove, meditating upon whatever may affect them most. *Amabilis insania*, a most incomparable delight is it to such persons so to melancholize and build castles in the air, and go smiling to themselves, acting an infinite variety

of parts, which they strongly imagine represented in reality. In such fantastical meditations, and ever-musing melancholizing, they are carried along like one that is led—like a Puck about a heath. They run on indulging their humours, until at last the scene is turned upon a sudden; they can endure no company, they can ruminate only on distasteful subjects. Fear, sorrow, and weariness of life, surprise them at last—they can think of nothing else; no sooner are their eyes open than this infernal plague of melancholy seizes on them, and terrifies their souls, representing some dismal object, which by no persuasion can they avoid—the arrow sticks in their flesh, they cannot get rid of it.” In no very gentle terms he goes on deprecating the indulgence of literary men in seclusion and loneliness—“*væ soli!*” He continues, “Woe be to him that is long alone! As the saying is,

‘homo solus aut deus, aut demon.’ These wretched creatures degenerate from social beings, into moody misanthropes; they do even loathe themselves, and hate the company of others; and we may say to them, as Mercurialis said to his melancholy patient, ‘Nature may justly complain of thee, that, whereas she gave thee a wholesome temperament, and a sound body, and, above all, the noble gift of a reasoning soul, thou hast perverted those gifts by solitariness, by idleness, and excess; thou art a traitor to God and nature, and thou thyself art the efficient cause of thine own misery.’” This was rather harsh language for a doctor to hold to his melancholy patient, or for Burton to apply to his fellow-sufferers, for he acknowledges himself to have been a victim to melancholy; and, indeed, it was impossible to have made the acquisition of his wonderful erudition without

the sacrifice of his health and spirits. In the succeeding chapter, however, he somewhat mitigates the severity of his censure, and admits that these melancholy feelings are often born and bred with us by habit, and that we often have them from our parents by inheritance; but religion, education, and philosophy can mitigate and restrain them "in some few men at some times," but for the most part that they overwhelm reason, and bear down all before them, like a torrent; and that their disorder oftentimes degenerates into epilepsy, apoplexy, convulsions, or blindness, if once it possess the ventricles of the brain.

Byron's temperament resembled that of the great majority of the *genus irritabili vatum*. But, whether it was that he took too much pleasure in parading his melancholy before the public eye, or that public attention was more

directed to it than it ever had been to the infirmities of any of his predecessors, from the greater interest he excited by his superior genius, certain it is that his mental gloom was more observed and less charitably considered than it ought to have been. There was indeed nothing extraordinary in its nature but its intensity, and nothing more of malignity in its character than is to be found in the dejection of thousands of other literary men of similar habits. The only wonder is, that it should ever have grown into such importance, even under the magnifying lens of public observation. Byron was "the observed of all observers," and it was the wayward pleasure of his misery to expose it unnecessarily to the public gaze. It is impossible to peruse his biography without carrying away a conviction of his egotism; and the reason is, that no man's privacy would bear

the scrutiny which his had been so minutely subjected to. The self-*est*esteem of authors is proverbial; even mediocre talents are seldom without vanity; but there never was a great poet who was not an egotist. Tully said to Atticus "that a true poet never thought any other better than himself. Ovid and Horace afford specimens of this sort of self-complacency, "*exegi monumentum æri perennius.*"—" *Jamque opus exegi quod nec Jovis ira,*" &c. But, we need not travel out of our own times for instances of this besetting sin of vain-glory: among the best and most amiable of our bards there propably exists but one splendid and solitary exception to the rule,—a man of genius without passions, and consequently without vices, without fervid enthusiasm, the calm, and even current of whose life for half a century had hardly an impediment to its tranquillity. But

this was not the lot of Byron—the child of passion—born in bitterness,

“ And nurtured in convulsion,”

all the elements of domestic discord were let loose upon his youth—a home without a tie to bind his affections to its hearth—a mother disqualified, by the frenzied violence of her temper, for the offices of a parent; and if he would escape from the recollection of that violence, no father's fondness to fall back upon, and no virtue coupled with his memory to make its contemplation a pleasure to his child, for he

“ Had spoiled his goodly lands to gild his waste,
Nor calm domestic peace had ever deigned to taste.”

It is difficult to conceive more unfavourable circumstances for the developement of a mind like Byron's; the only wonder is, that any of the

noble qualities of his nature escaped perversion. These circumstances are alluded to with exquisite pathos in *Childe Harold*,

“ I have thought
Too long and darkly, till my brain became
In its own eddy boiling and o’erwrought,
A whirling gulf of phantasy and flame,
And thus untaught in youth my heart to tame,
My springs of life were poisoned.”

Many, however, imagine that Byron’s melancholy was purely fictitious, and that the poet put on the vesture and garb of woe, as poor Maturin, after the battle of Waterloo, would one day put his arm in a sling, and another day wrap a silk handkerchief round his knee, and parade the town, to excite the sympathies of the gentle passengers. But it was not the “windy suspiration of forced breath, nor the

dejected 'haviour of his visage," that constituted his gloom. His misanthropy, at all events, was only in his pen, but his melancholy was in his heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

BYRON CONTINUED.

THE intensity of Byron's hostility to a fellow-creature, on any occasion, could never have entitled him to the love of our great moralist—he was a bad hater! So genuine was his gloom, that Burton himself might have revelled in its anatomy, for it was the very epitome of melancholy. The first time Moore saw him, he was struck with the spiritual paleness of his features, and the habitual melancholy of their expression. To ordinary observers there is nothing more

inexplicable than the mirth of melancholy ; the good people of Abdera would have it that Democritus was merry even to madness, because in the bitterness of his heart he could not choose but laugh at the follies of his time ; but Hippocrates told them that they were fools, for the man was neither mad nor mirthful. Goethe's "capricious temper," to use his own words, "was ever fluctuating between the extremes of sadness and petulance ;" Byron's capricious humour was ever alternating between the extremes of excitement and exhaustion.

"Though I feel tolerably miserable," he says, in his journal, "yet am I subject to a kind of hysterical merriment, which I can neither account for nor control ; and yet I am not relieved by it, but an indifferent person would think me in excellent spirits."

On one occasion, we hear of his asking Lady

Byron, with an attempt at light-heartedness, if he was not after all a very good-humoured man, and of the damper to his spirits in the shape of a reply ; “ No, Byron, you are the most melancholy man I ever knew.”

Wilkie has taken subjects less ludicrously pathetic for his pictures, than the melancholy poet attempting to be jocose, and inquiring of his wife, if he is not mirthful ; and the lady with a rueful countenance, in the serious act of expressing her dissent.

In one of his letters to Moore, he says, he feels as Curran said he felt before his death, a mountain of lead upon his heart ; and when Moore rallies him for his dejection, and tells him he could not have written the “ Vision of Judgment” under the depression of much melancholy, “ There,” replied Byron, “ you are mistaken ; a man’s poetry is a distinct faculty

or soul, and has no more to do with the everyday individual than the inspiration of the Pythoness, when removed from her tripod."

Byron was in the right; the author and the man are seldom one and the same being in the complexion of their humour; the vapours of the bard, and the vagaries of the muse have very little in common. What more dissimilar identities is it possible to imagine than Don Quixote wandering over Spain in quest of ridiculous adventures, and Cervantes pining in a dungeon; or John Gilpin performing antics on his diverting expedition to Edmonton, and Cowper wrapped up in his own miseries at Olney? What can be more contradictory in the nature of the same individual than Sterne, in the words of Byron, whining over a dead ass and neglecting to relieve a living mother; or Prior addressing the most romantic sonnets to his

Chloe, and indulging a most unsentimental passion for a bar-maid : or Swift, breaking the heart of Vanessa, by his cold-hearted behaviour, while he was filling the world with the praises of her wit and beauty ; or Petrarch, abandoning his family, while directing his labours to purify the poetry and refine the feelings of his countrymen, having the honours of paternity twice conferred upon him, and each time the distinction the reward of a different attachment ; or Zimmermann, inculcating lessons of beautiful benevolence, while his tyranny was driving his son into madness, and leaving his daughter an outcast from her home ; “ his harshness,” says Goethe, “ towards his children was the effect of hypochondria, a sort of madness or moral assassination, to which he himself fell a victim after sacrificing his offspring. But, be it remembered,” continues Goethe, “ that this man,

who appeared to have so vigorous a constitution, was an invalid during the greatest part of his life; that this skilful physician, who had saved so many lives, was himself afflicted with an incurable disorder."

Would that every biographer, in a similar spirit, scrutinized the infirmities of genius, and decided not on their errors before they inquired into the ailments which may have clouded reason, or weakened the powers of volition! We need not have recourse to the stars, like the amiable Melancthon, for the origin of melancholy; we are infinitely more likely to find it in the stomach; but wherever it be, the distaste of life, which is one of its most obvious symptoms, we are told by Goethe, is "always the effect of physical and moral causes combined; and while the former claims the attention of the physician, the latter demands the attention of the mora-

list." To investigate the phenomena of both is the province of the medical philosopher ; and if the object of his inquiry be to preserve the character of genius from the obloquy which ignorance and uncharitableness too frequently cast upon it, however imperfectly he execute the task, the motive which led him to it should at least disarm censure, though it fail to procure him commendation.

The question of Byron's hypochondria no one can dispute, who has perused his journals. Its various Protean forms are there set forth in language which affectation could not forge, nor fiction mimic. "What can be the reason," he says in his journal, "I awake every morning in actual despair and despondency? In England, five years ago, I had the same kind of hypochondria, but accompanied with so violent a thirst, that I have drank as many as fifteen

bottles of soda-water in a night, after going to bed." This unaccountable dejection without a cause, this constant waking in low spirits, he frequently alludes to, and expresses an apprehension of insanity ; in his own words, of " dying like Swift, at the top first."

In one of his letters from Italy, after speaking of a slight intermittent, he again recurs to his melancholy. " What I find worst, and cannot get rid of, is the growing depression of my spirits, without sufficient cause. I ride, I am not intemperate in eating or drinking, my general health is as usual, except a slight ague, *which rather* does good than not. It must be constitutional, for I know nothing more than usual to depress me to that degree."

In another, with some truth, he attributes his hypochondria to an hereditary taint. His mother was its victim in its most furious form,

her father " was strongly suspected of suicide ;" and another very near relative, of the same branch, swallowed poison, but was saved by antidotes. And Byron was said to have more resembled his maternal grandfather than any of his father's family. In fact, all the symptoms of hypochondria, the effect of some cerebral disorder, were his ; the restlessness of disposition, which renders every change a momentary relief, the aversion from the world which drives the sufferer into solitude, and yet makes solitude insupportable without the excitement of mental occupation, or such employment of the imagination as may divert the individual's attention from his own sad thoughts ; without such employment, Byron was the most miserable of men. It was for this relief that one of his poems was produced in a single night, and to one of these pa-

roxysms of melancholy the public are indebted for one of the most humorous of his productions. "I must write," he says in his journal, "to empty my mind, or I shall go mad."

CHAPTER XIV.

BYRON CONTINUED.

THERE is no question that Byron's disorder was grievously aggravated by ill-regulated habits; on the subject of regimen he held most ridiculous opinions; he believed the rigid abstemiousness of an anchorite to be compatible with the most profuse expenditure of nervous energy, and that the exhaustion of the mind was only to be balanced by a corresponding depression of the corporeal powers, so as to preserve a wholesome equilibrium. In very early

life, by carrying this absurd opinion into practice, he so weakened the digestive organs, that without the strongest stimulants the stomach was unequal to the retention of food except of the very simplest kind, and in the smallest quantity. In a word, dyspepsia was induced, and the original, and probably hereditary disease which was latent in his constitution, was developed. We believe it was much less for the sake of his personal appearance that Byron was so rigidly abstemious, than most people imagine. In early youth it might have been vanity inspired him with such a dread of obesity, but in his maturer years it was the sufferings from indigestion that followed every occasional excess which drove him to abstemiousness. But there was no moderation in his regimen; he was extreme in all things: the reason he gave Lady Blessington for the auste-

richness of his diet was, that “when the body is fat the mind becomes fat also.” In his early letters he dwells with great complacency on his rigid regimen and its lowering effects; but much as his anxiety for his personal appearance might have to do with his abstemiousness, it is highly probable it was the suffering in his head whenever his habit became phlethoric that drove him to the other extreme of an insufficient diet. In 1807, he boasts of having reduced himself by violent exercise, much physic, and hot-bathing, twenty-seven pounds. In 1808, he lost two stone more; and on another occasion he writes exultingly to Drury that he has reduced himself from fourteen stone seven pounds to ten stone and a half. Poor Lord Byron was little aware that by these violent measures he was sapping his constitution, and slowly and surely undermining his strength and

spirits. At the time, so far from suffering any inconvenience, he describes his agreeable sensations, and seems to have famished himself with the idea of augmenting his happiness. But like Hezekiah, behold ! for felicity he had bitter grief. After noticing, in his journal, his diet for a week, tea and dry biscuits six per diem, “ I wish to God,” he says, “ I had not dined now, it kills me with heaviness, and yet it was but a pint of Bucellas and fish. O my head ! how it aches ! the horrors of indigestion !” And elsewhere, “ This head, I believe, was given me to ache with !” In the last part of his journal, after a fit of indigestion, he says, “ I’ve no more charity than a vinegar-cruet ; would that I were an ostrich, and dieted on fire-irons !” And the melancholy diary finishes with these words—“ O fool ! I shall go mad !”

In Venice, in 1816, his system of diet was

regulated by an abstinence almost incredible; "A thin slice of bread," says Moore, "with tea, was his breakfast; a light vegetable dinner, with a bottle or two of Seltzer-water, tinged with *vin de grave*, and in the evening a cup of green tea, without milk or sugar, formed the whole of his sustenance; the pangs of hunger he appeased by chewing tobacco, and smoking cigars.

In 1819, he complains of being in a state of great exhaustion, attended by such debility of stomach that nothing remained upon it. When Shelley visited him in Ravenna, in 1821, his health was improved by better living; "but he had almost destroyed himself in Venice," continues Shelley, "and such was his state of debility that he was unable to digest any food.

Even in his last journey to Greece he carried the same absurd notion of starving himself into

practice ; his diet at Missolonghi was sparing in the extreme ; a few paras' worth of bread, fish, and olives, was the daily allowance for his table. Such a regimen might have suited the refectory of La Trappe, but it was ill-adapted for the board of one who had assumed the casque and not the cowl, and who had the toil and peril of an opening campaign to provide strength and spirits for. It is unnecessary to add, that the physical debility occasioned by this mode of living, from time to time produced such extreme exhaustion that he was obliged to have recourse to stimulants which afforded a temporary excitement, and, by reaction, in their turn augmented the sufferings they were taken to assuage. Ardent spirits, wine, and laudanum, were had recourse to, often in excess, and as often laid aside for an opposite mode of living equally pernicious. Byron, like Johnson,

could practice abstinence, but not temperance. He describes the effects of these stimulants on his spirits in one of his letters. "Wine," he says, "exhilarates me to that degree that it makes me savage, and suspicious, and even quarrelsome; laudanum has a similar effect, but I can take much of it without any effect at all. The thing that gives me the highest spirits, it seems absurd but true, is a dose of salts." It was in early life that he appears to have become addicted to the use of opium. In 1821, after speaking of exhilarating spirits and strong liquors, he says, he no longer takes laudanum as he used to do. At a later period, informing his friend of some slight indisposition, he tells him he has again lowered his diet, and taken to Epsom salts.

It would be useless to produce further proofs of the irreparable injury done to the constitu-

tion of Lord Byron by his injudicious regimen and ill-regulated habits; and when we find him, in the course of his travels, frequently attacked by local fevers, and at various intervals suffering from their recurrence, we may fairly conclude that his constitution had been predisposed to the reception of their miasma by his debilitating regimen. In those countries where intermittents most prevail, low living is thought to be most unfavourable to health, and there can be very little question but that Byron's constitution was shattered by the frequency of those attacks of fever. In 1810, he was seized with a severe fever in the Morea, and like most of the cures he attributes to the absence of physicians, he says his life was saved in this instance by his Albanian followers frightening away the doctors.

On another occasion he had a similar fever

at Patros, and speaking of his doctors, he says, he protested against both the assassins when he was seized with the disorder. On his second visit to Greece he was attacked by a similar local fever, and when he swam across the Hellespont he contracted an ague from which he appears to have suffered long afterwards. In 1817, he complains of the recurrence of a fever in Venice which he caught some years before in the marshes of Elis. In 1819, he writes from Venice, "I have been ill these eight days with a tertian fever caught in a thunder-storm. Yesterday I had the fourth attack; it is the fever of the place and the season." The Countess Guiccoli says he was delirious the whole time; he fancied his mother-in-law haunted his bed-side; yet in his ravings he composed some excellent verses which he subsequently burnt. In 1821, he had another

intermittent fever when setting off for Pisa, and he describes it as “bowing to him every two or three days, but not upon intimate terms” with him; he finishes by saying, “I have an intermittent generally every two years, and when the climate is favourable, as it is here, he speaks of his ague as doing him positive good. His last illness was the suite of another fever, of a remittent rheumatic character, caught only the day previous to his arrival at Missolonghi. On the vessel coming to an anchor among some little islands on the coast, he bathed in the open sea on a cold night in January, and continued in the water for a considerable time, although the storm had hardly subsided in which the vessel had been nearly wrecked only a few hours before. Speaking of the circumstance, Fletcher says, “I am fully persuaded it injured my Lord’s health; he cer-

tainly was not taken ill at the time, but in the course of two or three days he complained of pains in his bones, which continued more or less to the time of his death." And let us take this opportunity of doing justice to the good sense and good feeling that is to be found in every observation of this faithful servant. Fletcher's fidelity to his master survived his loss, while that of his historians has been fatal to his memory.

CHAPTER XV.

BYRON CONTINUED.

In the foregoing account there are fevers enough recorded to have shattered the vigour of half-a-dozen constitutions; and Byron's constitution, indifferent at the best, and debilitated by an ill-judged regimen, was so enervated by these various intermittents, as to have rendered the treatment of any serious disorder that might befall him, perplexing in the extreme to a young physician, and even difficult enough to

the best experienced: this must be allowed in justice, as well as in charity to the medical attendants of Lord Byron in his last illness.

Whenever death is the termination of disease, the world is too apt to call the nature of the medical treatment into question, and in many cases, to judge the inevitable issue of life and death as a matter between man and man, with little reference to an overruling agent. When one mode of treatment has been unsuccessful, we naturally suppose that another might have answered better, and, reasoning from antecedent facts, nothing is easier than to say, the result has been unfortunate, but another course might have produced a different effect. God is the only judge of this, and the judgment of man is always partial, and oftentimes presumptuous. It is with a full conviction of this truth, with an eager desire to avoid the assumption of

arrogant pretension, and the suspicion of professional animosity, that we venture to speak on the subject of Byron's last illness, and of the manner in which he was treated. There are circumstances, however, connected with his last illness, which render an inquiry into its nature and result, a matter of more than temporary interest, or of idle curiosity. It is not a simple question of skill or inability, of a disease mistaken or understood, but one of climate and constitution, and the modifying influence of both over disease.

The medical attendants of Byron were young practitioners; they had little experience in the treatment of the disorders of the Levant, and they had little, if any previous acquaintance with the constitution and peculiarities of their patient. The best informed European physician, who commences practice in the East,

finds his knowledge at fault when he trusts to the same remedies in the latter, which he has found efficient in the former, in similar diseases. He will find those which he was accustomed to consider inflammatory in the one, characterized in the other by symptoms of irritability, or of general disturbance of the nervous system, contradistinguished from inflammation by the inefficacy of antiphlogistic measures. If any general observation holds good in that science, to which general rules are seldom, if ever, applicable, the assertion may be hazarded, that nine-tenths of the maladies of hot climates are to be remedied without the lancet. The nervous energy suddenly depressed, is with difficulty raised, and in a shattered constitution with still more difficulty repaired. The ignorance of this fact may have subjected Byron to injudicious treatment, for that his disorder was

maltreated there appears much reason to apprehend.

From the effects of the bathing on "the cold night in January" he appears never to have recovered. By Fletcher's account, he was subsequently "one day well, another day ailing, though still able to go abroad." His symptoms were those of a febrile remittent and rheumatic character for some weeks, till at length, harassed in mind by continual vexations, tormented by the turbulence of the Suliote barbarians who were in his pay, and thwarted in all his endeavours to serve Greece by the rapacious chiefs, and the jealous Franks who were about him, his irritability increased, and concurred, as Moore has well expressed it, "with whatever predisposing tendencies were already in his constitution, to bring on that convulsive fit which was the forerunner of his

death. The fit he alludes to was that epileptic seizure which we have elsewhere noticed, and which, after depriving him of sense and speech, and violently convulsing his whole frame, left him in a state of such excessive weakness, that his strength never again rallied. The morning succeeding it he was found to be better, but still pale and weak ; he complained of a sensation of weight in his head ; leeches were applied to his temples, but a much larger quantity of blood was abstracted than his physicians had intended, for all their efforts to check the bleeding were completely baffled. We are told that blood continued to flow so copiously, that from exhaustion he fainted ; and it appears to have been on this very day, in the midst of his sufferings, that his life was threatened by his own soldiers. Colonel Stanhope has well described the scene. “ Soon after his dreadful paroxysm,

when faint with over-bleeding, he was lying on his sick bed, with his whole nervous system completely shaken; the mutinous Suliotes, their splendid attire covered with dirt, broke into his apartment, brandishing their costly arms, and loudly demanding their wild rights. Lord Byron, electrified by this sudden act, seemed to recover from his sickness, and the more the Suliotes raged, the more his calm courage triumphed. The scene was truly sublime."

The excessive bleeding above noticed, under all the circumstances of the case, was unquestionably fatal to Lord Byron; the death-blow was given to his shattered constitution, and the little strength that he had left to combat with the slow insidious malady which had been lurking in his frame for many days, was totally and irretrievably destroyed.

Captain Parry was the only person about

him who seems to have been aware of the nature of his attack, and understood the treatment that ought to have been adopted. "His lordship," he says, "had not eaten any thing but cheese, fish, vegetables, and bread, for several days. His disease was *epileptic*, and arose from debility and bad diet." The language of this rough soldier is that of a man of common sense: he understood the constitution of Byron probably better than any of his attendants; and when Byron still spoke to him of the necessity of low living, he said to him, "You must not live too low, my lord; in this swampy place some stimulus is necessary; but your physicians should know best."—"I considered," he continues, "there was some difference between his constitution and those of the persons whom Dr. Bruno was accustomed to treat;" (and with less courtesy than might have been desired, he adds,) "had

he turned his doctors out of doors, and returned to the habits of an English gentleman as to his diet, he would probably have survived many years." With the latter part of this opinion we entirely agree.

Alluding to his state of health in the middle of March, Moore observes, "from the period of his attack in February he had been from time to time indisposed, and more than once had complained of vertigos which made him feel as if intoxicated. He was also frequently affected with nervous sensations, with shiverings and tremors, which were apparently the effects of excessive debility; and proceeding upon this notion," continues Moore, "he abstained almost wholly from animal food, and ate little else but dry toast, vegetables, and cheese."

The grievous error of attributing to a plethoric state of the constitution such symptoms

as have been just described, no one acquainted with the simplest principles of medicine could possibly have fallen into ; but of these Byron, with all his various knowledge, was lamentably ignorant.

Plutarch has well advised all literary men to study the science of health. It is one of the anomalies in modern education, that total ignorance on so important a subject as the preservation of health, or the prevention of disease, should be compatible with a reputation for general erudition ; it is strange, indeed, that while the science soars above the clouds in quest of the knowledge of the heavens, or seeks in the lower strata of the earth an elucidation of the mystery of its formation, that the wonders of the animal economy should attract no portion of its attention, and that while the elements of every other art are ac-

quired in our colleges, not even a superficial knowledge of the first principles of medicine is a necessary part of a gentleman's education. Students may come from Cambridge and Oxford with all "the blushing honours of the University thick upon them." They may come forth "decked with the spoils of every art, and the wreath of every muse;" champions of theology, prodigies of erudition, masters of the wisdom of former times, and yet be actually ignorant of the theory of the circulation of the blood. They may have wasted the best years of youth, and the first of life's blessings in the acquisition of unspoken tongues, and yet not know how to obviate the evil effects of studious habits on their health, to check disease,

"Prevent the danger, or prescribe the cure."

CHAPTER XVI.

BYRON CONTINUED.

WE are now arrived at the last illness of Lord Byron. Its immediate cause appears to have been long exposure to rain on the 19th of April. It is well to bear in mind, that the night bath we have elsewhere alluded to was on the 4th of January ; the 15th of February he was seized with the epileptic fit, and on the 9th of April commenced the illness which terminated in death on the 19th.

Immediately after his return home on the

9th, he was seized with shivering; he complained of fever and much head-ache. Dr. Bruno proposed bleeding; to this he objected, and Parry seconded his remonstrance. “I was confident,” says Parry, “from the mode in which he had lately lived, and had been lately tormented, that to bleed him would be to kill him. *He was fairly worn out, and the momentary heat and symptoms of fever were little more, I believe, than the expiring struggles, or the last flashes, of an ardent spirit.*”

Parry's opinion is not couched in medical phraseology, but it is the language of common sense—and common sense at the bedside of the sick is more valuable than technical absurdity, or theoretical erudition without experience.

The following day he was thought to be so much better, as to be allowed to go abroad, but on his return he had perpetual shudderings,

and was unusually dejected in his spirits. On the 11th he was very unwell, had shivering fits continually, pains over every part of his body, particularly in his head; he talked a great deal and rather in a wandering manner. Dr. Bruno saw no danger, but Parry became alarmed for his safety, and wrung his unwilling consent to go immediately to Zante for change of air.

The two following days the fever rather decreased; he rose during the day, and even left his bed-room. In the meantime a vessel was prepared for his departure, but a hurricane ensued, and it was impossible to leave the port; “and it seems,” says Parry, “as if the elements had combined with man to ensure Lord Byron’s death.”

On the 14th Dr. Bruno having exhibited soporifics without advantage, again urged the necessity of bleeding, but his patient would not

hear of it ; he arose and left his bed-room for a short time, but returned to it exhausted, and he came out no more ; he was occasionally delirious in the evening, “ but his delirium,” says Parry, “ arose not from inflammation. It was that alienation of mind which is so frequently the consequence of excessive debility.”

“ There was no symptom of violence in the early period of his disease, such as I have seen in other young men attacked with fever— such as I believe would have been most severe in Lord Byron’s case ; the delirium,” he continues, “ at every stage arose from extreme debility.” Had he said from nervous irritability, he might have spoken more technically ; but the substance of his opinion could not have been more correct.

Byron’s delirium was no more to be removed by anti-inflammatory means than the raving arising from exhaustion in typhus fever, or from

excessive irritability in delirium tremens. Dr. Bruno, having for the last two days endeavoured in vain to persuade him to submit to bleeding, Mr. Milingen, a young surgeon, was sent for, to prevail on the patient to undergo the operation. Mr. Milingen says he tried every means that reasoning could suggest towards attaining his object, but his efforts were fruitless.

“Is it not,” said Byron, “asserted by Dr. Reid, that less slaughter is effected by the lance than the lancet, that minute instrument of mighty mischief? And do not those other words of his apply to my case,” he continued, “where he says, ‘the drawing blood from a nervous patient is like *loosening the chords of a musical instrument whose tones already fail for want of sufficient tension?*’ Who is nervous if I am not? do with me whatever else you like, but bleed

me you shall not. I have had several inflammatory fevers in my time, when more robust and plethoric, yet I got through them without bleeding; this time also will I take my chance."

After much entreaty, however, Mr. Milingen extorted a promise, that if his symptoms increased he would submit to the remedy.

On the 16th he was alarmingly ill, and almost constantly delirious. "He spoke," says Parry, "English and Italian, and very wildly. I implored the doctors not to bleed him, and to keep his extremities warm, for in them there was already the coldness of coming death. I was told there was no doubt of his recovery, and I might attend to my business without apprehension."

Mr. Millingen now pressed on him the necessity of submitting to be bled, and he certainly employed the argument that was most likely to weigh with Byron; he gave him plainly

to understand that utter and permanent deprivation of reason might be the consequence of his refusal. "I had now," says Mr. Millingen, "hit on the sensible chord, and, partly annoyed by our importunities, partly persuaded, he cast at us both the fiercest glance of vexation, and throwing out his arm, said in an angry tone, 'There; you are, I see, a d——d set of butchers—take away as much blood as you like, but have done with it.'

"We seized the moment," continues Mr. Millingen, "and drew about twenty ounces; on coagulating, the blood presented a strong buffy coat, yet the relief obtained did not correspond to the hopes we had formed. *The restlessness and agitation increased, and the patient spoke several times in an incoherent manner.*"

No doubt his symptoms were increased; and as little doubt is there that the inference that was

drawn from the buffiness of the blood was fallacious, inasmuch as any appearance of coagulated blood in a hot climate is an imperfect criterion of febrile action; and even in this country, few physicians, we apprehend, would consider the buffiness of the blood an indication for further depletion without other concomitant phenomena in the temperature, the appearance and the temperament of the patient, to corroborate the proof of inflammation.

On the 17th the bleeding was twice repeated, “and the appearances of inflammation on the brain,” says Moore, “were now hourly increasing.” If there was any inflammation in the case, it is strange that the cerebral symptoms should on every occasion have been aggravated after the bleeding. “Each time after the depletion,” says Parry, “he fainted; his debility became so excessive that his delirium assumed

the appearance of a wild rambling manner, and he complained bitterly of want of sleep. Blisters were applied to the lower extremities, but their application was too late to have proved beneficial."

It appears that there was neither order nor quiet in his apartment; that all the comforts of the sick chamber were wanting; that his attendants were so bewildered as to be totally disqualified for their painful duty, and that Parry, the only one of them whose attendance might have been beneficial to his friend, was either otherwise employed, or his presence little desired, except by the invalid. But in Parry's occasional visits the two or three last days of his life, he speaks of "such confusion and discomfort in the sick man's chamber as he never wished to see again."

On the 18th, in the afternoon, he rose, and

supported by his servant, was able to walk across the chamber, and when seated, asked for a book, read for a few minutes, and found himself exhausted ; he then took Tita's arm and tottered to his bed. A consultation was proposed ; Byron on being told that Mavrocordato advised it, unwillingly gave his consent. Dr. Frieber, Mr. Millingen's assistant, and Luca Vaya, a Greek physician, were accordingly admitted, on condition of asking no questions. They promised to be silent ; the business of the finishing ceremony was gravely performed ; one of the doctors was about to speak, but Byron reproved him. " Recollect, said he, your promise, and go away."

The following is Mr. Millingen's account of the consultation. " Doctors Bruno and Luca proposed having recourse to anti-spasmodics and other remedies, employed in the last stage

of typhus; Frieber and I maintained that they would hasten the fatal termination; that nothing could be more empirical than flying from one extreme to the other; that if we all thought the complaint was owing to the metastasis of rheumatic inflammation, the existing symptoms only depended on the rapid and extensive progress it had made in an organ previously so weakened and irritable. Antiphlogistic means could never prove hurtful in this case; they would become useless only if disorganization were already operated; but then, since all hopes were gone, what means would not prove superfluous? We recommended the application of several leeches behind the ears and along the course of the jugular veins; a large blister between the shoulders and sinapisms, to the feet, as affording the last hopes of success. Dr. Bruno being the patient's physician, had the

casting vote, and prepared the anti-spasmodic potion which Dr. Luca and he had agreed upon : it was a strong infusion of valerian and ether. After its administration, the convulsive movement, the delirium increased, but notwithstanding my representations, a second dose was given, and after articulating confusedly a few broken phrases, the patient sunk shortly after into a comatose sleep, which the next day terminated in death. He expired on the 19th of April, at six o'clock in the afternoon."

CHAPTER XVII.

BYRON CONTINUED.

Now in Parry's account, Dr. Frieber, so far from coinciding in opinion with Mr. Millingen, had warmly condemned the mode in which Lord Byron had been treated. "It was by his recommendation and advice," says Parry, "I believe that it was now resolved to administer the bark. I was sent for to persuade Lord Byron to take it." From an intimate acquaintance of several years with Dr. Frieber, as he is termed, but whose true name was Schrieber, we are enabled to corroborate the

observation of Captain Parry. Parry may have been mistaken about the medicine, but at the period of its administration, whatever it might have been, it was too late to have produced any effect : when Parry was inducing him to swallow a few mouthfuls of it he found his hands were deadly cold. It was now evident Byron knew he was dying. Tita, his affectionate servant, stood weeping by his bed, holding his hand, and turning away his face from his master, while Byron, looking at him steadily, exclaimed, "*O questa e un bella scena !*" When Fletcher came to him he endeavoured to express his last wishes, and between his anxiety, says Moore, to make his servant understand him, and the rapid failure of his powers of utterance, a most painful scene ensued. On Fletcher asking him whether he should bring pen and paper to take down his words, "*O no !*" he replied, "*there is*

no time ;” his voice became hardly audible : for a considerable time he continued muttering to himself a few names of the friends who were most dear to him. After a feeble effort to explain his wishes, he exclaimed, “ Now I have told you all.”

“ My lord,” replied Fletcher, “ I have not understood a word !”

“ Not understood me !” said the dying man, with a look of the utmost distress, “ what a pity—then it is too late, all is over.”

“ I hope not,” said Fletcher ; “ but the Lord’s will be done.”

“ Yes, not mine,” replied Byron ! He then tried to utter a few words, of which none were intelligible except “ My sister ! my child !” When Parry loosened the bandage that was tied round his head, he appeared to revive a little ; he shed tears after it was

loosened, then took Parry's hand, uttered a faint good night, and then sank into a slumber.

“It is plain,” says Moore, “that this person had, by his blunt practical good sense, acquired far more influence over his lordship's mind than was possessed by any of the other persons a bouthim.”* During the evening he occasionally

* With feelings of regret, we have to add that this unfortunate gentleman, whose goodness of heart and straightforward conduct Byron was wont to speak of in the highest terms, is now the inmate of a lunatic asylum. A long series of misfortunes, the cause or consequence, we know not which, of intemperate habits, had “steeped him in poverty to the very lips,” and ultimately deprived him of reason. A friend of ours, who had known him in better days, when lately visiting the wards of Bedlam, heard his name pronounced as he passed one of the cells, and when he turned to the speaker and tried to recognize his features, the wretched man exclaimed. “Do you forget poor Parry!” If this note should fall under the eye of any friend of Byron, who would willingly do that, which,

slumbered, and when he awoke he muttered to himself rapidly and incoherently. For the next twenty-four hours he lay in a comatose state, incapable of sense or motion; life was only indicated for some hours by the rattling in his throat; at length it ceased, and Byron was a corpse at sun-set!!!

The autopsy of his remains was conducted by his medical attendants; their prognosis was borne out by the appearances they discovered or described—indubitable appearances of inflammatory action on the brain were stated to have been observed: They might have been deceitful—they may have been imaginary; the attention of the examiners was pre-eminently directed

if Byron were within the influence of earthly feelings, could not fail to be pleasing to his spirit, he may probably be induced to inquire into the fate of this poor gentleman, and have the charity, if it be practicable, to relieve his misery.

to the brain, and with all their anxiety to look for facts, the forms of pre-conceived opinions might have presented themselves to the senses, with all the vivid force of actual impressions. Anatomists well know that in the most violent disorders death is very frequently unaccompanied by the visible læsion of any organ, and that even where actual disorganization is discovered, the cause of death may have been elsewhere. The spine may be gorged with blood—the vessels of the brain may be likewise turgid. The agony of death, and not the disease, may have occasioned these appearances, or the position of the body after death may account for them. From the *post mortem* examination, in this case, the existence of inflammation has been generally inferred, and the treatment has been censured only for the tardy employment of the lancet. The writer of an

elaborate article in the Westminster Review has adopted the notion, that Byron died in consequence of an inflammation of the brain; at least, he adds, "if the appearances really were as described, that he might have been saved by early and copious bleeding is certain. That his medical attendants had not, until it was too late to do any thing, any suspicion of the true nature of his disease, we are fully satisfied." No less fully satisfied are we that the writer of this article was as ignorant of the true nature of the disease of Byron, as he presumes his physicians to have been, and that bleeding at any period of the disorder would not only have been ineffectual, but injurious. The indication, we take it, from the commencement of the disorder, was the alleviation of excessive nervous irritability, arising from a local remittent fever, slowly developed, and indistinctly marked in all

its symptoms. Mild aperients, antimonial sudorifics, the occasional exhibition of camphor and ammonia, and even more direct stimulants than the diffusible, when the exhaustion was extreme; the use of anodynes when the nervous symptoms were increased, and even of opiates when irritability was such as to produce insomnolency, and that kind of cerebral excitement which resembles *delirium tremens*. This is the treatment in similar disorders of the Levant we have seen successfully adopted, and which we believe was far better adapted to the case before us than the opposite plan that was practised. At this distance of time, from the event to which it refers, were the question mooted with the unworthy motive of calling professional ability into question, for the purpose of cavilling with its conduct, because its efforts were unsuccessful, these observations

would merit any obloquy that might befall them. But, they have been written with other views, and we trust, at least, that the younger part of our professional brethren, who visit climes dissimilar to their own, may profit by the experience which others may have reached by the road of error, and may be instrumental to the preservation of lives of perhaps greater value to the world than their own.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

THE celebrated John Bell has said in one of his works, that the sight of an unskilful operation was more serviceable to the spectators than that of the most successful and expert one, inasmuch as those who witnessed the defects of the operator had the opportunity afforded them of profiting by his errors. The principle of the observation applies to the followers of literary pursuits; there is more evil to be avoided by an acquaintance with the infirmities of genius, than

by the observation of the manifold advantages of the best regulated habits, and happily constituted temperaments. Nevertheless, the history of a well-ordered mind, like that of Scott, is not without its lesson; and perhaps, by the encouragement of the example it offers for imitation, exhibits the advantage and the reward of mental management, of moderated enthusiasm, and of the government of imagination, as powerfully as the calamities of Cowper and the errors of Lord Byron tend to persuade their followers to avoid their errors. In our notice of Scott, it will be unnecessary to enter into such minute, or biographical details, as the nature of our inquiry into the infirmities of Cowper and Byron led us into. In these instances the sufferings and the faults of the individuals were wound up with all the circumstances of their lives; but in the case of Sir

Walter Scott, his career had the tranquillity of a summer stream, pursuing the even tenor of its way in one undeviating course. It was Sir Walter's good fortune to be born in that country, whose genius, in the language of the Irish Demosthenes, "is cast in the happy medium between the spiritless acquiescence of submissive poverty, and the sturdy credulity of pampered wealth: cool and ardent—adventurous and persevering—which wings its eagle flight against the blaze of every science, with an eye that never winks, and a wing that never tires." It was his still happier lot from his earliest years to "have known the luscious sweets of plenty, to have slept with full content about his bed, and never waked but to a joyful morning;" to have had no difficulties to struggle with in his early career, no privations to endure, no extraordinary adventures to encounter, and few dis-

appointments, for a great portion of his life, to sear his feelings, to irritate his temper, or to sour his affections. The rare combination of splendid genius and sober judgment, whether the occasion or the consequence of his fortunate position in social life, must have unquestionably been influenced not a little by the favourable circumstances which attended his career for so long a period ; but one thing is certain—the result of his temperament, however constituted, or by whatever circumstances confirmed, was the diffusion of an exuberant benevolence over his feelings, which communicated a spirit of general philanthropy to every composition that issued from his pen. This was the great charm, not only of his writings, but of his conversation—the spell by which the mighty magician of romance worked on the feelings of mankind, and bound up the faculties in wonder and enchantment.

The peculiarities of temperament, in no small degree depend upon the health of the individual; irritability of temper, and placidity of disposition, much oftener than people imagine, are questions of bodily ailments, or the absence of them; peevishness and good humour are but too frequently matters that are relative to physical peculiarities, and timidity and resolution are qualities which are determined to a great extent by the condition of the nervous system. This doctrine, like that of phrenology, has been impugned, not because it is untrue, but because its tendency is considered to be dangerous. We, however, believe it to be otherwise; and in asserting it, we war but with the malignity which “tracks the errors of genius to the tomb,” not with the morality which visits the depravity of the heart with legitimate censure. Who can peruse the biography of Pope,

without feeling that the irritability of his temper was the consequence of bodily infirmities, which rendered his life “a long disease?” Who can doubt, but that the moroseness of Johnson’s humour, was the result of a “fierce hypochondria,” and that Byron’s errors and eccentricities were largely influenced by an hereditary disease, aggravated by alternate extremes of irregular and abstemious habits? And who indeed can doubt but that Scott’s happy temperament was mainly indebted for its felicity to long continued health.

If ailing people were to argue from such a doctrine, that the conduct of their tempers, and the government of their passions, (being at certain intervals under the dominion of disease,) had wholly ceased to be under the control of reason—if they imagined that as invalids they were privileged to be as irritable as Pope, as

morose as Johnson, as wayward as Byron, as intemperate as Burns, or as melancholy as Cowper, not only without reproach, but with impunity; then indeed there would be danger in the doctrine, and truth itself would not justify its promulgation. But the objection is an idle one, for neither peevishness, nor moroseness, nor morbid sensibility, nor melancholy, can be indulged in with impunity; each carries with it its own punishment, and its votary (if such it could have) would soon become its victim. But even if his health suffered not from the indulgence of his capricious humours, how simple would he be, how little acquainted with the history of genius or the calamities of its children, if he expected that the world would privilege his peevishness, make allowance for his petulance, or pity his infirmities? Fool that he would be to expect its charity; what considera-

tion do the errors or eccentricities of genius ever meet with from it?

Scott and Goethe are two of the most remarkable instances in modern times of genius so divested of its ordinary errors, that the admiration it called forth was scarcely mingled with a sound of literary hostilities. In both, the poetic temperament was seen to greater advantage than we have been accustomed to behold it. It disqualified them for no duties, public or private; it unfitted them not for the tender offices of friendship or affection, and the world for once enjoyed the rare exhibition of two great poets who were good husbands, good fathers, and good citizens. Their works were imbued with a spirit of philosophical philanthropy, which the public taste was luckily in the vein to appreciate; and if their competitors joined in their applause, it was because they

had no injuries to complain of at their hands, no bitter asperity to apprehend from their criticisms, no injustice from their strictures, no ungenerous treatment from the pride of their exalted stations. In each instance a happy temperament enabled its possessor to preserve that station which his genius had attained, and in either the management of that temperament was commensurate with the enjoyment of health and vigour. It required, indeed, no ordinary stock of health to enable an author to resist the wear and tear of mind and body, which the incessant application to literary pursuits is productive of; no little vigour, both bodily and mental, to render an individual capable of the immense amount of literary labour which Scott had the courage to encounter, and the persevering industry to get through without seclusion from the world, and apparently without fa-

tigue. By what happy means was he enabled to accomplish so much? Were his days and nights devoted to these labours? Was the midnight oil expended in their performance? Were the hours of composition stolen from his slumbers, and the freshness of the morning devoted to the reparation of exhausted strength? Was the "pale and melancholy cast of thought" spread over his features? Was the fountain of inspiration dried up for a season after his imagination had poured forth a living flood of truth or fiction? Did the enthusiasm of the poet prevail over the sober sentiments of the man? or were they so exalted by the chivalrous exploits he described, that the excitement of his feelings was followed by lassitude and depression? In short, was the enthusiasm of his page so faithful a transcript of the ardour of his breast, that in giving breath to the sweet music of

romance, the sound of every striking passage was so much in unison with the tone of dearly cherished thoughts, that the vibration of every well-remembered note extended to the heart? In sooth, we believe that no such fervid emanations were called forth by "the ideal presence" of the scenery, or the heroes he called into existence. That he contemplated them with pleasure, and even with pride, is very probable; but that he suffered his raptures, either at the moment of composition, or subsequently to it, to disturb the serenity of his feelings, we greatly doubt.

Scott's enthusiasm was in his fancy, not in his feelings; his benevolence was heart-born, and his imagination was subservient to its impulses, but both were under the dominion of a sober judgment. His nervous energies, we apprehend, were seldom called on to answer the

sudden demand of any inordinate or irregular affection—a demand, often repeated, which, more than any amount of literary labour, exhausts the spirits, and makes inroads on the strength of the constitution. The means by which he was enabled to accomplish so much in so wonderfully short a period were simply these: he rose early, he lived temperately, he retired to rest at seasonable hours; the forenoon was devoted to his studies, and those studies debarred neither recreation nor exercise; he entered on proper pursuits at proper times, and the result of the well-regulated employment of less than the fourth part of the four-and-twenty hours, was, that he was enabled to perform a multiplicity of labours which we can hardly imagine the incessant employment of a whole life sufficient for the execution of. His time for composition was usually in the

morning, from seven till twelve or one o'clock. The ordinary amount of a day's production was fifteen or sixteen pages, and for many years the number of his publications was from three to eight volumes a year. But, what extraordinary fertility of imagination was necessary for the series of compositions that issued from his pen with such astonishing rapidity !

CHAPTER XIX.

SIR WALTER SCOTT CONTINUED.

THESE volumes carried with them the internal evidence of the healthy feelings of the author ; they were evidently the productions of a man who was at peace with himself, “ in love with his nativity,” and in charity with all mankind. They smelt not of the midnight lamp, but of the rosy morning air, whose freshness was diffused as well over the feelings as the features of their author ; no sickly palor, no sentimental gloom, no morbid sensibility overclouded either,

and whether we conversed with him in person or communed with him in print, our hearts acknowledged,

“ A merrier man,
Within the limit of becoming mirth,
We never spent an hour's talk withall :
— For aged ears played truant at his tales,
And younger hearings were quite ravished,
So sweet and voluble was his discourse.”

But there was nothing, we repeat it, of the feverish fervour of enthusiasm in the feelings of Scott, and no traces of that passion in his countenance. There was indeed as little of the celestial inspiration of the bard in the ruddy aspect of the author as can be well imagined ; and but little in his regard to give the observer an idea of

“ The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
Glancing from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven.”

There might be evidences indeed of deep and even painful thinking in the lines of his prominent forehead and overhanging brows; but there was more of the vigorous-minded country gentleman in the general expression of his countenance, than of the “poet of imagination all compact.”

Scott's sensibility, fortunately for his felicity, was not of that intense description that its tranquillity was staked on the hazard of his literary success, or that the labour of composition was coupled with the anxieties of authorship, the ardour of enthusiasm, or the ecstasies of successful genius. In this respect Scott had the decided advantage over the majority of the *genus irritabile* of authors, whether of works of prose or poetry. Pope could not proceed with certain passages of his translation of Homer without shedding tears. Metastasio was found

weeping over his *Olympiad*. Alfieri speaks of a whole act in one of his plays written under a paroxysm of enthusiasm, weeping while he wrote it. Dryden was seized with violent tremors after the composition of his celebrated ode. Rousseau, in conceiving the first idea of his *Essay on the Arts*, felt the disturbance of his nervous system approaching to delirium. Buffon could not enter on a work which absorbed his faculties, without feeling his head burn, and his features becoming flushed. Beattie, after the completion of a volume of metaphysics, never had the courage to look into the book when it was printed, so great was the horror of his undertaking. Goldoni says he never recovered from the exhaustion of his spirits after the production of sixteen comedies in one year. Smollet by over-excitement disordered his brain, and laboured for six months

under a coma vigil. These and many other instances have been enumerated by D'Israeli in his admirable work. Scott, however, was luckily exempt from the excitement of such morbid feelings, and from the delusions which are the consequences of them. It is but a step, it is said, which separates the fervour of enthusiasm from the frenzy of insanity, and not unfrequently are the children of genius found tottering on the verge of that calamity. Tasso held a conversation with a spirit gliding on a sunbeam, and we are told by Thuanus, he was frequently seized with fits of distraction which did not prevent him writing excellent verses. Malebranche heard the voice of God distinctly within him. Lord Herbert interrogated the Deity about the publication of his book, and in a kneeling posture calmly awaited the reply. Pascal often started from his chair

at the appearance of a fiery gulf opening by his side. Luther conversed with demons, and on one occasion threw an inkstand at the devil's head, an action which his German commentator greatly applauds, because there is nothing the devil hates so much as ink. Descartes, after long seclusion, was followed by an invisible person calling on him to pursue the search of truth. Swedenburgh not only walked over Paradise, but has given a description of the fashion of the houses ; but the glorious egotism of Benvenuto Cellini, says D'Israeli, outstripped the visions of all his predecessors, for he was accustomed to behold a resplendent light hovering over his own shadow.

In short, that literary boundary of which we have spoken, which separates enthusiasm from insanity, is like the narrow bridge of Al Sirat, which leads the followers of Mahomet from

earth to heaven, but by so narrow a path, that the passenger is in momentary danger of falling into the dismal gulf of hell, which yawns beneath him. But Scott was in little peril of falling into the purgatory of enthusiasm: if he ever advanced towards the boundary in question, it was with a steady step and an air of self-possession, which showed he was prepared for the dangers he approached.

But independently of the well-regulated habits by which he was enabled to accomplish so vast a number of literary performances, nature appears to have endowed his constitution with a robustness, proportioned to the vigour of his mind, which was capable of overcoming mental labour without fatigue, which would have been not only wearisome but overwhelming to another. There is something in the vigour of the higher order of genius, which contributes not

only to longevity, but renders the individual equal to labours which one can hardly imagine the powers of one man capable of accomplishing.

“Those,” says Tissot, “who would undertake the defence of long-continued studies, which I am far from wishing to under-rate the importance of, in pointing out the dangers to which literary men expose themselves by excessive application, may cite many instances of studious men who have attained old age, in the full enjoyment of health, bodily and mental. I am not ignorant of the history of such persons. I have even known some few, but the generality have not the same good fortune to boast of; there are few men, however happily constituted, strong enough to support with impunity such excessive toil; and if they did support it, who knows what sufferings they may not have

endured, and if they might not have added to their length of days, had they attached themselves to another sort of life? It is true, we must admit, that the greater portion of those great men that the human race acknowledge for its masters, had arrived to an advanced age: Homer, Democritus, Parmenides, Pythagoras, Hippocrates, Plato, Plutarch, Bacon, Galileo, Harvey, Boyle, Locke, Leibnitz, Newton, all lived to be old men,—but from this must we infer that excessive mental application is not injurious? Let us beware of drawing so false a conclusion. We may only presume that there are men born for those sorts of excesses, and perhaps that a happy disposition of the fibres which form great men, is the same as that which conduces to longevity. *Mens sana in corpore sano.* Besides it is much more by the strength of their genius, than by the assiduity

of their labour, that literary men make to themselves an immortal name. Moments of delightful leisure, distractions which celebrity necessarily brings with it, exercise which the duties of their high station in the world obliges them to take,—these in a great measure tend to repair the evil which literary employment occasions.”

Tissot proceeds to eulogize the well-regulated habits of an eminent professor of Oriental literature, who had just died, and had he been speaking of the author of *Waverley*, he could not have used language more suitable, or more characteristic of the subject of his notice.

“Every body remembers at this moment,” he continues, “and recalls even before I name him, that great man who for more than fifty years was the ornament, and the delight of this city and its academies: he had cultivated the

sciences from his earliest youth even to his last days; he was profoundly versed in all those studies which were more immediately the business of his vocation, and of which the domain is so extensive; there was no subject on which he was not instructed; so much knowledge implied immense labour, yet his health was not injured by it; we have seen him enter on his eighteenth lustrum, without having lost a particle of his genius, or of the vivacity of his senses; and will this example be adduced as an objection to my argument? It cannot be, for the recollection of the details of his life that are given here, fulfil the purposes of presenting him as a model for the contemplation of all men of genius. He knew how to be a scholar without ceasing to be a man; he knew how to acquire the profoundest knowledge, and the most various attainments, without sacrificing his

duties to erudition, in performing those of a citizen, a father, a friend, a member of society, and a professor of learning, as if he had been only a simple citizen, a domestic being, and a man of the world. When wearied by his mental labours it was his custom to repair his strength and spirits by exercising his body in the cultivation of his grounds, and he supported both by that gaiety of heart, that amenity of manners, which is killed in the study, and which is only maintained by communing with our fellow-men for our mutual advantage."

CHAPTER XX.

SIR WALTER SCOTT CONTINUED.

THE health of Scott derived no little advantage from such exercise and intercourse as Tissot speaks of. We are told by Allan Cunningham, "it was his pleasure to walk out frequently among his plantations, with a small hatchet and hand saw, with which he lopped off superfluous boughs, or removed an entire tree when it was marring the growth of others. He loved also to ride over the country, on a little stout gallopway, and the steepest hill did not stop him, nor the deepest water daunt him."

His passion for field sports furnished him likewise with a recreation, which was no less conducive to his well-being; his taste for such pastime is, indeed, a singularity which is not often to be met with in men of studious habits. Literature, they think, is the noblest pleasure that can be chased, and it is unfortunately the only one they pursue. There are so few instances on record, of literary men indulging in the pleasures of the field, that it seems almost incongruous to speak in the same breath of a scholar and a sportsman. But Scott was an exception; when his imagination was wearied "with babbling of green fields," he betook himself to them with a right good appetite, for the wholesome recreation they afforded. With his "veteran favourite," Maida, "the fleetest of Highland deer-hounds," it was his delight to sally forth, and to make the plea-

tures of the course the object or the excuse for many a delightful ramble over the romantic hills of his native country. Perhaps it was the frequency of such rambles which induced the Ettrick Shepherd to believe that "he had a little of the old outlaw blood in him, and if he had been able would have been a desperate poacher and black fisher." But with all the poaching propensities of the Author of Waverley, no Sir Thomas Lacy of his neighbourhood suffered from them; he only hunted deer, but we are not informed by the worthy Shepherd that he ever stole them.

The fact is, that exercise was essential to his health, and in combining it with field-sports, he gave the charm of a manly and wholesome recreation to what might be considered a duty to his constitution. If there be an antidote to the toil of composition it is exercise; and if

there be a preventive of the ills which literary flesh is heir to, it is regimen. Scott well knew the advantages of both, but most sadly are they overlooked by authors in general. An hour or two in the afternoon devoted to a few calls on their friends is deemed sufficient for the reparation of nervous energy, exhausted by the unintermitting labour of six or seven hours; they feel they are unequal to fatigue, for muscular strength is the barometer of the vital powers, and therefore the employment of the locomotive organs is wholly neglected. If the night is devoted to mental application, the morning makes amends for the hours which have been stolen from the natural period of repose, and what matters it whether the moon or the noon-day sun presides over their slumbers? It unfortunately matters much more than they imagine; they devote their nervous energies to the

greatest of all labours at a period when all nature is deprived of the vivifying principle which animates every object in the animal or vegetable kingdom, and “steep their senses in forgetfulness,” when every thing that has life around them is receiving a new and more lively sentiment of existence, from the influence of those beams whose electrical phenomena are more analogous to those of life, than any that we are acquainted with. If the employment of the pen of such persons is dignified by the name of an elegant pursuit, which is supposed to soften the manners, and to refine the taste of the votaries of science, they deem it better to become its martyrs, than to share with the illiterate or the vulgar the blessing of rude health.

If the spirits at length become wearied by incessant application, if even during their meals

the nervous energy is summoned to the brain from every other organ, especially from those where its influence is most requisite for the due performance of the process of digestion; if the appetite begins to fail, the temper to be soured, the sensibility to be morbidly increased, and that the labour of the closet, in the words of Rousseau, “*Les rends délicats, affaiblit leur tempérament, et que l’âme garde difficilement sa vigueur, quand le corps a perdu la sienne; que l’étude use la machine, epuise les esprits, détruit les forces, enerve le courage, rend pusillanime, incapable de résister également à la peine, et aux passions;*” nothing is to be added to the demonstration of the dangers that surround their health and happiness. Yet are these premonitory symptoms of disease, of morbid irritability of the organs of digestion, of hypochondria, and all its horrors, wholly neg-

lected and overlooked. If they have only strength enough to pursue the avocation which insidiously undermines their constitution, they dream not that disease is a possible occurrence so long as bodily pain is not endured: they know not that the fiercest paroxysm of hypochondria, the severest attacks of dyspepsia, are seldom accompanied by physical sufferings. But if they are reminded by the dejection of their spirits, or the diminution of bodily strength, of the injury their health has sustained, and is daily sustaining, from the over-exertion of one organ, and the total inactivity of every other, then indeed they have recourse to the physician, or rather to the faculty, for they commonly travel through every sign in the zodiac of privileged empiricism, from the Balance, the sign in which the daily allowance of bread and meat is doled out to the invalid, to

Aquarius, the sign of the water-gruel system, where the advantages of thin potations are magnified, and extolled “to the very echo that doth applaud again.” If they go still further, and knock at the door of Ursa Major, they will probably find the Great Bear of the profession hugging his own doctrine to death, and in the midst of many ungainly gambols, extending his great paw over an ample volume, and dismissing his visitors with a good-natured growl — the customary intimation to go about their business, and read his book. And accordingly, they go at the first growl and read “the book,” and swallow blue pills every night, and black draughts every morning, till some new star in the medical constellation out-twinkles the old bear, and it becomes the fashion to consult the ast discovered luminary.

But, in sober seriousness, the use of powerful

remedies in disorders of the stomach, is seldom followed by a more than temporary relief: eventually their effects are injurious; how can they be otherwise, when injudiciously employed, or the principle mistaken on which they are recommended, or that principle too general in its application to meet every peculiarity of age, condition, and constitution? “*Ætatem aliam, aliud factum convenit*,” says Plautus, but not so the fashionable dietetic doctor; there is but one mode of treatment for the innumerable and dissimilar symptoms of a disease; no matter whether the patient is young or old, male or female, of a sanguine or a saturnine temperament, of a vigorous or a debilitated constitution—no matter where the seat of the disorder be, the head, the stomach, or the liver, he is doomed to go through the same undeviating routine either of blue pill and black

draught, of carbonate of soda, or subcarbonate of iron ; and if the remedies, like the torture of Procrustes, are not fitted to the sufferer, the sufferer is fitted to the remedies—that is to say, the feeble powers of his constitution are habituated to them. But verily and truly, we believe that more injury is done by medicine to dyspeptic patients, than would arise to the constitution from its total non-employment. The celebrated Hufeland carries this notion to a far greater extent, and applies it to the whole range of chronic maladies, without impugning the character of that profession of which he is one of the brightest ornaments in Germany.

CHAPTER XXI.

SIR WALTER SCOTT CONTINUED.

THE fault in a great measure lies in the victims of the malady we are speaking of, (the literary malady;) they are generally heedless enough of present health, but anxious in the extreme about prospective and imaginary ills. Forthcoming evils are continually casting their shadows before them, and every feeling of malaise is magnified by fear into a symptom of some serious disorder. The consequence is, on trivial occasions they are continually having re-

course to unnecessary and even injurious medicines ; ether, volatile ammonia, spirituous tinctures, carminatives, and ultimately laudanum, — are the remedies which “nervous people” constantly have recourse to ; but again and again do we repeat it, there is no antidote but exercise for the disorders of the studious, and no preventive but regimen. By these only may the effects of excessive study be obviated and new vigour infused into the constitution, so as to enable it to sustain for any length of time the daily toil of mental labour. Sydenham has given a very imposing and somewhat scholastic account of his regimen, which appears certainly not to have been remarkably abstemious ; but to its regularity the good effects are due which Sydenham ascribes to it. “In the morning when I arise, I drink a dish or two of tea, and then ride in my coach till noon ; when I return

home I immediately refresh myself with any sort of meat, of easy digestion, that I like, (for moderation is necessary above all things. I drink somewhat more than a quarter of a pint of Canary wine immediately before dinner every day, to promote my digestion, and to drive the gout from my bowels. When I have dined, I betake myself to my coach again, and when business will permit, I ride into the country for good air. A draught of small beer is to me instead of a supper, and I take another draught when I am in bed, and about to compose myself to sleep."

"There is a wisdom," says Bacon, "in regimen beyond the rules of physic. A man's own observation of what he finds good, and what he finds hurtful, is the best medicine to preserve health. Celsus could never have spoken it as a physician had he not been a wise man, when

he gives it as one of the great precepts of health, that a man do vary and interchange contraries, but with an inclination to the more benign extreme; to use fasting and full eating, but rather full eating; watching and sleep, but rather sleep; sitting and exercise, but rather exercise; so shall nature be cherished, and yet taught mysteries."

"Beyond the general rules of low moderate diet," says Heberden, "which every practitioner must be acquainted with, all people best know what agrees with them, and can ascertain it as well, if not better, than the doctor."

Every man, indeed, of common sense is the best judge of his own digestion, and every thing that agrees with it he may safely conclude is good for him; he has no need of diet-books to regulate his mode of living. To make

general laws for the diet of individuals, to legislate for the stomach, and for each legislator to lay down particular rules and ordinances at variance with his neighbours, for one to issue his fiat against farinaceous food in every instance, and another to preach up a medical crusade against all vegetable substances; for a third to obtest mankind by the love they bear their lives to abstain from wine; and a fourth to sing pæans (not perhaps quite so poetical as “*O fons Blandusiæ*,”) in praise of water; this is, indeed, to suppose that one set of rules is applicable to every form of a disease, or that the same organ at all times is in the same condition, and similarly affected at different periods, and under different circumstances, by the same agents.

In a word, a popular diet book, based on such a presumption, is the mere impertinence of phy-

sic. We may conclude with old Burton, that in what regards our regimen, "our own experience is the best physician; so great is the variety of palates, humours, and temperaments, that every man should observe, and be a law unto himself. Tiberius, we are told by Tacitus, did laugh at all those who, after thirty years of age, asked counsel of others concerning matters of diet."

At forty, says the adage, a man is either a fool or a physician; but at any age the individual is likely to become a valetudinarian for life, who lives by medicine, and not by regimen.

We have been carried away from our subject, but our observations are not perhaps altogether irrelevant to it, nor wholly unimportant to our readers. The unbroken vigour of Scott's constitution throughout the greater portion of a life of literary labour, was unquestionably

owing to the regularity and temperance of his habits, and to wholesome exercise. But without that exercise, even the "*ventrem bene moratum*," which Seneca proclaims the advantages of, would not have been sufficient for the preservation of his health, or the reparation of the vigour that was exhausted in his study.

The common error of the studious was not his, of devoting day after day, or night after night to some literary pursuit, and of wearying out the body in the constant service of the indefatigable mind; "of compelling (as Plutarch observes) that which is mortal, to do as much as that which is immortal; that which is earthly, as that which is etherial." Scott's regular recreations, on the contrary, put the body in a state to obey the suggestions of the stronger and the nobler part. Not an hour did he occupy himself in planting or embellishing his grounds,

not a morning did he allot to the pleasures of the chase, nor set apart a portion of his leisure for a joyous ramble in the country, that he did not return from the "*deambulatio per amœna loca*," with recruited spirits, for the encounter of new toil, and invigorated powers that had shaken off the temporary senectetude of study.

In many points the habits of Milton resembled those of Scott: he was no less temperate, no less sober-minded, but unfortunately the acrimony of party strife sometimes steeped his pen in bitterness approaching to malevolence. The sufferings, however, of a painful malady, might have had not a little to do with the asperity of his politics. The labour moreover of composition, as might be expected from the nature of his productions, was intense, and frequently deprived him of repose. "He would

oftentimes," says Richardson, "lie awake whole nights together, but not a verse could he make; at other times he would dictate perhaps forty lines in a breath, and then reduce them to half the number. He held an absurd opinion that his poetic vein never flowed happily, but from the vernal to the autumnal equinox, and that the coldness of this climate was unfavourable to the flights of his imagination. Till his infirmities confined him to the house, he was in the daily habit of taking exercise in his garden, but in the intervals of his gouty pain, being unable to leave his room, he used to swing in a chair, and sometimes play on an organ; and even this mode of exercise most people will deem preferable to that of Lord Monboddo, who for the sake of his health was accustomed to rise every morning at four o'clock, and then walk about his room, divested of his habiliments;

with the window open, for the purpose of enjoying what he called his air bath. But Johnson's idea of exercise was certainly a more agreeable one than either Milton's, or Monboddo's; he told Boswell with becoming gravity, "that if he had no duties here, and no reference to futurity, he would spend his life in driving briskly in a post-chaise with a pretty woman." But, much as we admire the doctor's taste, we rather believe that Scott's mode of taking exercise was the more salubrious of the two.

Those "*labores hilares venandi*," (as Camden terms the field sports of Staffordshire,) which Scott took delight in, were more likely to produce the effect which Galen has so strongly pointed out the beneficial results of: the promotion of pleasurable excitement by the general

diffusion of the animal spirits, as it were, over the whole frame, by the use of exercise, till the whole body tingles with the glow of incipient perspiration, "*usque ad ruborem, sed non ad sudorem.*" This is indeed the grand point that is to be observed in taking exercise—to take as much as the individual is capable of bearing without fatigue.

It is a folly to think that the necessity for bodily activity may be superseded by means of medicine, or regimen, or habits, in other respects the best regulated in the world. Exercise is indeed indispensable to health; and without health, ask the sick man where is happiness, and he may tell you, at least, where it is not, when he points to his own bosom.

But how is exercise to be taken by those who dwell in the busy haunts of the literary world,

who are confined to their closets by their pursuits the greater part of the day, or without necessity indulge their literary indolence in the immurement of their study, with the same feelings of veneration for its imprisonment which King James gave such eloquent words to, when he visited the library of Sir Thomas Bodley: “If I were doomed to be a prisoner, and the choice were given me of my prison, this library should be my dungeon; I would desire to be chained by no other bonds than the clasps which incarcerate these pages, and to have no other companions in my captivity than these volumes.” How then are the studious to escape from their fascinating pursuits to devote even an hour to bodily exercise? The first law of nature is said to be self-preservation—the first law of life is motion—its most essential requisite, activity. “Do not be inac-

tive, says the Arab poet, El Wardi, "for water becomes putrid by stagnation, and the moon, by changing, becomes bright and perfect."

CHAPTER XXII.

SIR WALTER SCOTT CONTINUED.

THE same idea, but somewhat amplified, is found in "the Anatomy of Melancholy," in an argument for the necessity of exercise: "The heavens themselves run continually round; the world is never still; the sun travels to the east and to the west; the moon is ever changing in its course; the stars and the planets have their constant motions; the air we breathe is continually agitated by the wind, and the waters never cease to ebb and flow; doubtless, for the

purpose of their conservation, to teach us that we should ever be in action." The ancients had so much faith in the good effects of exercise, that many of their disorders were treated solely by medical gymnastics. Germanicus was cured of an atrophy by riding, Cicero of a grievous infirmity by travelling. The Roman physicians sent their consumptive patients to Alexandria, and the Greeks shipped their nervous ones to Anticyra, nominally for change of air, but really for the advantages of exercise and recreation. The father of physic was the first who introduced medical gymnastics into practice; he described various sorts of these exercises, but those on which he placed most dependence were friction of the whole frame, somewhat similar to the process of shampooing, and a swinging motion of the hands and arms. The advantages of both modes of promoting the insensible

secretion of the skin, and of maintaining the bodily vigour, by the activity of almost every muscle, are but too little known, and consequently but little practised. And not the least advantage of such modes of exercise is, that every one may employ them, whatever be his occupation, or however constantly confined to the house.

The literary man, who has a horror of the feral amusements of the field, or who thinks a ride on horseback, or on ramble a foot, more fatiguing than the weariness of the soft-cushioned elbow-chair, in which the worst weariness of life is often felt, will find in these employments a salubrious occupation, an invigorating exercise, even in his closet. No in-door activity is indeed comparable to that which is taken in the open air; but unquestionably health may be preserved, and strength maintained for a very

long period by devoting ten minutes, night and morning, to those frictions Hippocrates so strongly recommends. and which are to this day in such general use in those eastern countries, where they are not half so essential to health, as they are in colder climates; and likewise by the occasional use, at least every fourth or fifth hour, of that other mode of exercise which has been described, or what perhaps is still better, of employing it in that manner in which sailors are accustomed to exercise their arms in cold weather.

The chest, which has been contracted and compressed by a hurtful posture, is expanded by the vigorous action of the muscles; in fact the whole of them are called into active exertion by it.

This form of medical gymnastics, with the windows of the apartment thrown open while it

is employed, and a few brisk turns in the chamber, if unfortunately no garden is at hand, is, indeed, the only substitute for those recreations, which combine the advantages of wholesome air, with the charms of delightful scenery.

The thews and sinews of the brawny blacksmith, who stirs not more than one day in seven from the precincts of his forge, to a certain extent illustrates the invigorating effects of this sort of exercise; and we are persuaded that the exemption of the people of the East from many European disorders, from gout, dyspepsia, and phthisis, is not wholly due to the peculiarity of climate, or to temperate habits, but in a great measure to the process of shampooing, either in the bath, to which the latter is subservient, or in their private houses, in which it is every day in use.

In all probability the mode of applying friction by means of the flesh brush in this country, has caused it to fall into such general disuse—it is neither efficient nor agreeable; a simple glove, made of common white drugget, without divisions at the fingers except for the thumb, as the woollen mittens of children are commonly made, is the best thing that can be used for the extremities, and a common flesh brush, covered with the same material, with a handle about fifteen inches in length, is by far the most convenient and effectual mode of applying friction to the body. We are so thoroughly convinced of the utility of the chafing glove, that however misplaced the mention of its advantages may seem to be in these pages, we still most strenuously venture to recommend its employment, to those who have most need of exercise, and least inclination, or perhaps opportunity, to take it;

to those who are deprived by their pursuits of that insensible secretion of the skin, which is essential to health, and the obstruction of which, (as we have seen in the case of the unfortunate Cowper,) is frequently the cause of the gravest maladies which afflict humanity.

So few of the infirmities of genius were the portion of Sir Walter Scott, that if we have wandered from our subject, it is because there is hardly an untoward circumstance in the fortunate career of this great man up to a late period of his life, which is calculated to illustrate the argument which it was the aim of the preceding pages to establish. But though there are few errors of conduct to be noticed, and still fewer physical infirmities to be connected with them, no indulgence to be demanded for the one, and no charitable feelings to be appealed to for the other, there is still a moral in

the secret of his happiness to be found in the record of his virtues, his moderated passions, and well regulated habits, which has the strong persuasion of an admirable example to recommend it in lieu of the awful lesson of a life of error and of suffering for the enforcement of a warning.

The period, however, arrived when fortune began to weary of her smiles, and the long unclouded horizon of Sir Walter became darkened by adversity. He had unfortunately connected himself with the house of Constable, and the failure of that house was the means of involving his affairs in what might have been considered irretrievable ruin. This disastrous circumstance is plainly and succinctly described in the notice that is prefixed to the Abbotsford subscription, but with, perhaps, a pardonable leaning to the imprudence which led to the calamity.

“ The crisis which took place in commercial affairs generally, and which particularly affected every person engaged in literary undertakings, involved Sir Walter Scott in losses alike unexpected and unprepared for, to the amount of 120,000*l*. Ruinous as this demand must have been, it is yet obvious, that after surrendering, to its payment, the whole of his property, he might have secured to himself and his family the fruits of his subsequent exertions, and realized from his later works not less than 70,000*l*. The whole of this sum, with whatever more a lengthened life might have enabled him to obtain, he with manly and conscientious feeling appropriated to the benefit of his creditors. In thus devoting his talents to the acquittal of obligations not originally, though legally his own, he laboured with a degree of assiduity, and an intenseness of anxiety, which shortened

his existence by overstrained intellectual exertion."

It is only to be wondered at, how a sober-minded man (which Scott unquestionably was) could have been so incautious as to have entangled his fortune in the speculations of his publishers; but in all probability, the mania of building, embellishing, planting, and collecting objects of antiquity, (which led to an expense exceeding fifty thousand pounds,) was the cause of his embarrassment, by compelling him to have recourse to other plausible means of increasing his income than those of literary emoluments, immense as his were.

In the five years that succeeded the bankruptcy of Constable from 1826 to 1831, he produced no less than one and thirty volumes, the profits of which, and of the new edition of his novels, which amount to the surprising number

of seventy-four volumes, were devoted to the diminution of his debt, and by his indefatigable literary labours, (almost exclusively,) he was enabled to pay off fifty-four thousand pounds. His life had been ensured in favour of his creditors, for twenty-two thousand pounds. Further payments out of his personal property still further reduced that debt, so that the whole does not now exceed twenty thousand pounds. From the period of his embarrassments it was evident Sir Walter was writing less for the public than for his creditors, but unfortunately more for either than for his fame. From the publication of his last novel in 1826, every succeeding work was a fainter emanation of his extraordinary genius, and perhaps the last of his productions was the feeblest gleam of its departing glory.

“The prodigious labour,” says the author of the admirable sketch of his life in the Penny Magazine, “which these numerous and voluminous works necessarily required, was too much, however, even for the most ready intellect and robust frame. The present writer, when he saw Sir Walter for the last time, in 1830, was struck by the change which a comparatively short period had produced in his personal appearance. A few years previously he looked a hale and active man in middle life—now at the age of sixty, he appeared at least ten or twelve years older. When told of the death of a gentleman of his acquaintance, by paralysis, a few days previously, he appeared much struck, and made a remark which seemed to indicate some secret apprehension in his own mind, of the fatal malady that was then lurk-

ing in his own over-wrought mind." At length the springs of life, so long over-tasked, began to give way. During the ensuing winter, (1831,) symptoms of gradual paralysis, (a disease, it seems, of which his father had also died, but at an advanced age,) began to be manifested. His lameness became more distressing, and his utterance began to be obviously affected. Yet even in this afflicting and ominous condition he contrived to work with undiminished diligence. During the summer of 1831, he grew gradually worse; his medical attendants strictly forbade mental exertion, yet he could not be restrained from composition. In the autumn, a visit to Italy was recommended; he was with difficulty prevailed on to leave Scotland, but at length he yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and sailed in the following October. His health seemed improved by the voyage, but after visit-

ing Naples and Rome, at both of which cities he was received with almost regal honours his desire to return to his native land became irrepressible, and he hurried homeward with a rapidity, which in his state of health was highly injurious, and doubtless accelerated the catastrophe which perhaps no degree of skill or caution could have long delayed. He experienced a further severe attack (a second paralytic seizure) in passing down the Rhine, and reached London in nearly the last stage of physical and mental prostration. Medical aid could only, it was found, for a short period protract dissolution; and to gratify his most ardent dying wish, he was conveyed by the steam packet to Leith, and once more reached his favourite house at Abbotsford—but in such a pitiable condition that he no longer recognized his nearest and dearest relations. After linger-

ing in this deplorable state till, in the progress this melancholy malady—this living death—mortification had been some time proceeding in different parts of the mortal frame—he expired without a struggle, on the 21st of September, 1832, in his sixty-second year.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

SIR WALTER SCOTT CONTINUED.

WE have a few observations to make on the nature of the malady which terminated the existence of this great and good man, without entering into any medical disquisition on the subject, but simply for the purpose of directing the attention of the general reader to a malady which literary men are more subject to than persons of any other avocation.

How many instances are recorded in the obituary of genius of the fatal visitation of this humiliating disease! How many awful ex-

amples of its power and its tyranny, not only over life but over all the ennobling attributes of humanity ! The angel of death hovers not over the head of man in so terrible a form ; the blow is struck, and he who was but yesterday the master-spirit of his age, “ the foremost man of all the world,” is to-day the object of its pity, the living emblem of life and death, a melancholy spectacle of the light of intellect fading into fatuity—of vitality and death,—or at least, the semblance of each in the corresponding members of the same body. Who can contemplate the fearful phenomena of power and immobility, of animation and the extinction of its attributes in the same form, and the sad exhibition of a great man’s mind, tottering on the ruins of its lofty throne, and eventually brought down, “ quite, quite down,” to the level of the lowest capacity, without feeling the

pride of reason confounded at the sight, and the softer feelings of nature utterly overpowered?

It is indeed "a sorry sight," but yet is it one which the friends of the martyrs to literary glory but too frequently have to witness. Copernicus, Petrarch, Linnæus, Lord Clarendon, Rousseau, Marmontel, Richardson, Steele, Phillips, Harvey, Reid, Johnson, Porson, Dr. Wollaston, and Scott, are a few of the many eminent names of those who have fallen victims to excessive mental application, by paralysis or apoplexy. Are the generality of literary men sufficiently acquainted with the nature of this disorder to be able to discern its premonitory symptoms, and to obviate or diminish those pre-disposing causes which lead to it? We believe they are not; or if they are acquainted with its characteristics, the frequency of such attacks, unattended as they are by immediate

dissolution, causes them to under-rate the importance of familiar facts, to extenuate the peril of an evil of too common occurrence, but which it is very possible to avoid, though it may not be so to remove the effects of, if once they have occurred.

Those maladies which arise from a disturbance of the nervous functions of the brain, have not only a common character, but in a great measure an intimate connexion. Apoplexy and palsy, epilepsy and hysteria, hypochondria and mania, though they stand not in the relation of cause or effect, are at least modifications of disease, arising from a morbid condition of the nervous system, and generally connected with functional disorder in the digestive organs. The three distinguishing characters of epilepsy, apoplexy, and palsy, are convulsion, coma, and loss of voluntary motion.

But all of these disorders are referred by medical writers to one common source, namely, pressure on the delicate substance of the brain, arising either from a fulness of the vessels of the head, or a rupture of them; but at all events, to a plethoric state of the brain, either chronic or acute and accidental. But we are strongly inclined to believe that this doctrine with respect to palsy in the great majority of cases in which paralysis is the consequence of excessive mental application, is not only erroneous, but the treatment which is founded on it worse than ineffectual—even highly injurious.

The paralytic seizure in the cases we allude to, supervenes on the exhaustion of mind and body, and its conquest is over the ruins of a broken-down constitution; and so far from originating in a plethoric condition of the circulating system, *its origin, we believe, and every*

day's experience confirms the conviction, is an imperfect supply of blood to the brain, and an irregular distribution of it. Under such circumstances, general blood-letting would certainly be an objectionable remedy—under all circumstances we fear that it is resorted to, at least on the onset, without discrimination, and without advantage. No matter whether the patient is of a sanguineous or a saturnine temperament; of a vigorous or an enervated constitution; blood-letting, even to the abstraction of pounds, of this vital fluid, is fearlessly recommended to be adopted in cases wherein the principle of vitality is already half extinguished.

There may be, indeed, few cases of paralysis in which any mode of treatment has the power of preventing the recurrence of an attack eventually fatal. But we have seen many instances in which its recurrence has been prevented for

a period of many years, and the patient, in the interval between the first and second seizure, left in the enjoyment of tolerable health, where the very opposite mode of treatment has been used ; where the diffusible stimulants, and aromatic tonics, and aperients, had been exhibited from the commencement, combined with the strictest regularity of regimen without abstemiousness, for even generous living is compatible with the rules of a well-ordered regimen.

From Mr. Savory, formerly of Bond-street, we remember to have heard an account, eight or nine years ago, of a friend of his, a baronet, well-known in the gay world, having been seized with paralysis, and finding himself, on his return from a convivial party, suddenly deprived of speech, and the power of moving one side of his body. Either from feelings of desperation, or an impulse of mental aberration,

the gentleman had a bottle of port wine brought to his bed-side, and having finished it, he turned with great composure on his side, and went to sleep. That gentleman is now living, his intellect wholly unimpaired, his speech restored, and his general health as good as it ever was; and he still daily discusses his bottle or two of port wine with apparent impunity.

Few, we imagine, would have the folly, or the recklessness of life which this gentleman exhibited, to think, under similar circumstances, of following his example; we would not recommend them: our only wonder is, that in this instance it was not fatal. But nevertheless, how can we reconcile the impunity with which this powerful stimulant was taken at such a moment, with the notion of the malady arising from a plethoric condition of the cerebral vessels?

Dr. Powell, in an elaborate paper in the college transactions, has brought forward a mass of evidence, to prove that paralytic affections, both partial and general, do frequently originate in a peculiar condition of the nerves alone; that they are independent of any morbid affection of the blood-vessels of the head, and that they are produced either by sympathy with irritability of the stomach, or the sudden impression of cold on the surface of the body. If this hypothesis be correct, which there is great reason to believe—namely, that it is a nervous, and not a vascular disorder—the inutility of treating it on the principle of an inflammatory or plethoric state of the latter system is obvious, and the necessity of considering it as a disturbance of the nervous system, occasioned by the depression of its energies, and followed by an imperfect supply

of blood to the brain, and an unequal distribution of it, is no less evident ; and these observations will not be without advantage if one medical man is induced to pause, before he has recourse to the lancet, in the treatment of a malady which is incidental to the exhausted vigour of a shattered constitution.

Palsy and apoplexy are so closely connected, that they stand in the relation of cause and effect ; still is it difficult to say which is the precursor and which the consequence. Palsy, however, is generally looked upon as a minor degree of apoplexy, and its attacks, says Dr. Gregory, in his most admirable work on the practice of physic, is commonly preceded for several days, or even weeks, by some of the symptoms which are the forerunners of apoplexy, such as giddiness, drowsiness, numbness, dimness of sight, failure of the powers of mind,

forgetfulness, and indistinctness of articulation.

But the facts which have perplexed physicians for ages remain in the same condition as they were left by Hippocrates twenty-one centuries ago. The reason why the power of sensation should remain perfect while that of voluntary motion is wholly lost is still a mystery; why the loss of that motion should be on the right-hand side of the body, while the injury in the brain, either from effusion or hæmorrhage, is on the left; and *vice versa*, on the left of the body when the pressure is on the right, we know not; we surmise, it may arise from the decussation of the nervous fibres, but we are unable to trace it. Why the senses should be hardly affected, while the mental faculties are invariably impaired, we cannot tell; we only know, that the mind which

was once powerful and resolute, becomes weak and timid. The post mortem examination of those who have died of paralysis, has thrown no additional light on our knowledge of its nature. When paralysis quickly terminates in apoplexy, the ordinary appearances of the latter disorder are met with, the rupture of a vessel and serous or sanguineous extravasation; but in palsy of long standing the morbid appearance in the brain may be a discolouration of the striated portion, and a corresponding softness of its substance, serous effusions in the ventricles; but in a vast number of cases no preternatural appearance whatever is to be observed, except a flaccidity of the substance of the brain.

This was the appearance which the brain of Sir Walter Scott presented on the post

mortem examination : the whole left side of the medullary substance was found in a soft and flaccid state, and globules of water were found distributed over the surface of the same side. In all probability his excessive application went on slowly producing this mischief in the brain during the last five or six years of his existence, when he was driven by his pecuniary embarrassments to literary labour, which was too much for the strength of any human being.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

WITH the last of the preceding notices we conclude these pages. In glancing at such parts of the biography of Pope, Johnson, Burns, Cowper, Byron, and Scott, as seemed to be connected with the history of their health, we endeavoured to point out its influence on the mind of each, and to show how far the power of disease had controlled the conduct, or chequered the career of most of them.

The object we had in view was to rescue the

character of men of genius from the unmerited severity which it daily encounters at the hands of shallow criticism, and also from the unmitigated censure which is bestowed upon its imperfections by the enmity of invidious ignorance.

How far we may have succeeded in the attempt, will be determined by the fate of this little work ; but whatever that may be, the least partial of our judges cannot deem more humbly of the ability displayed in these pages to do justice to such a subject, than we do. And we are well aware, that we have barely touched on many an important topic connected with that subject, which in abler hands might have afforded sufficient matter for its ample illustration.

But, however briefly and imperfectly our task has been accomplished, we have at least

the consolation of feeling that no other but a laudable motive induced us to undertake it, and we have the greatest of all literary authorities for the opinion that great enterprizes are laudable, even when they are above the strength that undertakes them.

Had we known of any other English work of a similar tendency, the present one would probably have never seen the light. Tissot's admirable treatise, "*Avis aux Gens des Lettres*," so far as it goes, leaves nothing to be desired on the subject of the health of studious people. But of all who have written on the subject of the literary character, Currie, to our mind, in his brief life of Burns, has evinced the best knowledge of his subject. After Currie, and only not before him because the light of medical philosophy was wanting to "*the Anatomy of Melancholy*," Burton deserves to rank.

And next to these, the author of "the Curiosities of Literature" would, probably, have ranked, had the advantages, which both the others derived from their professions, been his; had he the same opportunity of tracing the analogies of mental and physical infirmities—or of speculating like Burton, daily and hourly on the effects of the latter, and of the influence of the literary malady in his own person, on the chief mental faculties. Our opinion, however, of the excellence of these authors is to be gathered in the preceding pages from the frequent reference we have made to their works, and which if we have failed in any instance to have acknowledged, we have done so from inadvertency.

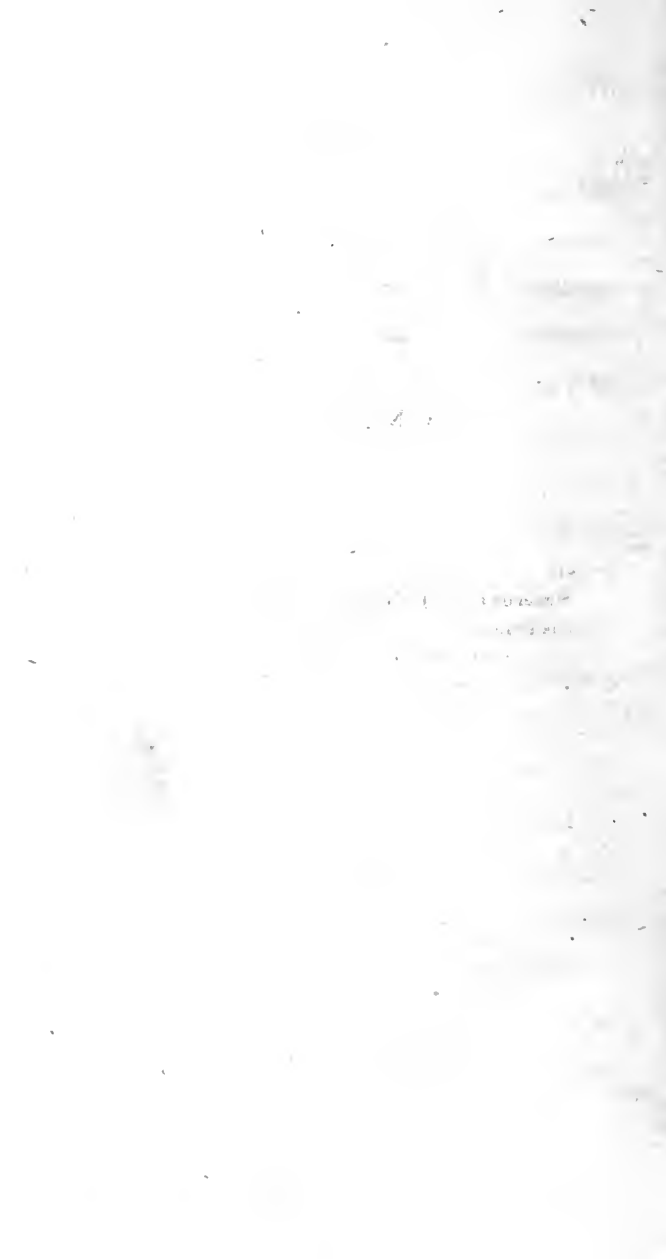
But there is one motive we have had in view, which we did not think it necessary to parade before the reader, at the outset of his perusal

of these pages, namely, the opportunity which a literary subject of general interest afforded, of introducing here and there some medical observations, of sufficient importance to every literary person, to deserve attention, though unfortunately of too little interest, in the form of a dry disquisition on a medical topic at any length, to engage it.

It was, therefore, our object to convey information of a medical kind, on many subjects connected with the infirmities of genius, without seeming so to do, or at least without wearying the attention of the general reader with details on any subject of a professional character. This we trust we have accomplished, and in making the lives of those eminent persons we have made choice of, the vehicle of opinions respecting the health of literary men, and its influence on their happiness; we hum-

bly hope the delicacy of that subject has not been forgotten, and that in endeavouring to vindicate the literary character, there is nothing to be found in "The Infirmities of Genius" which the moralist at least may have to censure.

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